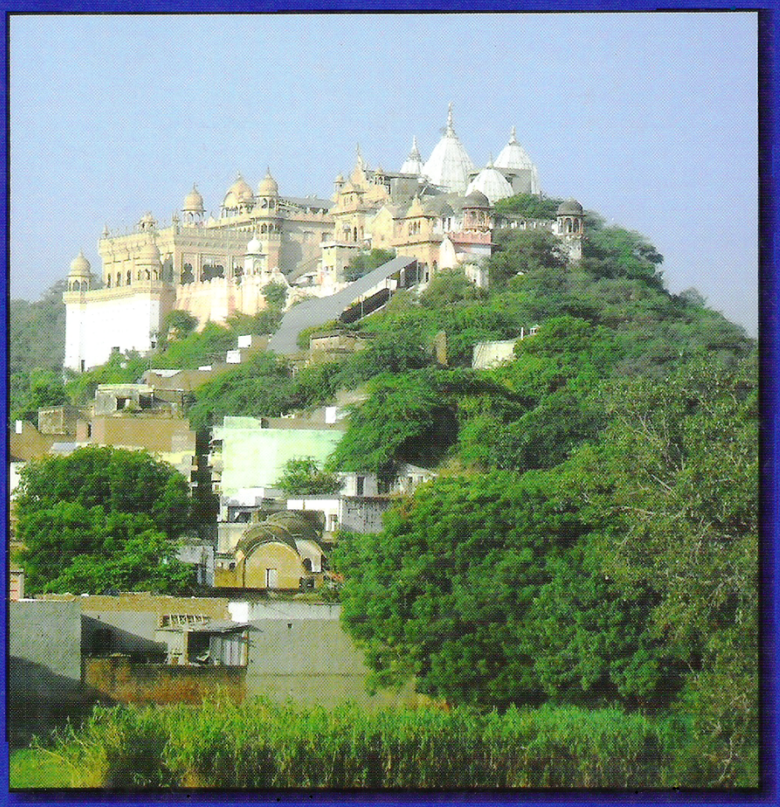
The Complete Guide to ISKCON's

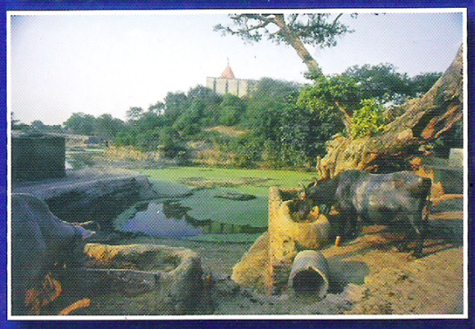
VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA

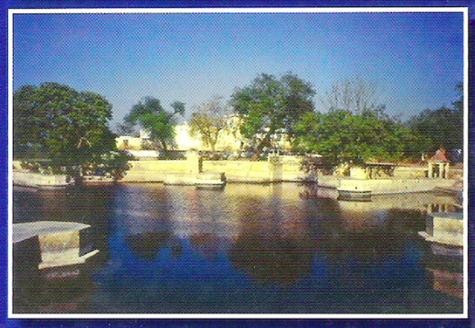
And the Twelve Sacred Forests of Vrindavana



Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari

"Those who with firm faith and devotion for Lord Krishna, who perform the *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala - are freed from all sins and go back to godhead at the time of death. *Mathura Mahatmya*





The 84 Most Important Holy Places of the Vraja Mandala Parikrama Including; **Vrindavana**, **Mathura**, **Radha-kunda**, **Govardhana**, **Kamyavana**, **Varsana**, **Nandagrama**, and **Gokula** - Plus 50 Detailed Maps of the region

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And the Twelve Sacred Forests of Vrindavana

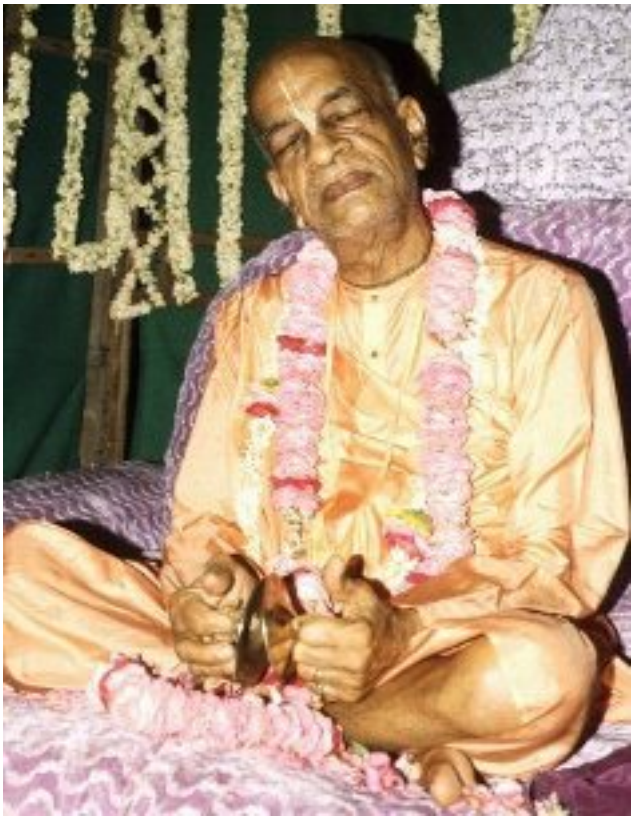
By
Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari

This book is an abridged version based upon
The First Historical Guide To

'Chaurasi Kosa'
BRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA

Including over 500 Important Holy Tirthas
By Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari

This book is dedicated to
our beloved spiritual master



His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Founder Acharya - The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

He revealed the holy land of Vrindavana
Dhama before the whole world

The Complete Guide to Iskcon's Vraja Mandala Parikrama
And the Twelve Sacred Forests of Vrindavana

All the words found in *italics* in this book are;
Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Brijbasa, Bhojpuri words.

Readers interested in the subject matter
of this book are invited to correspond
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Front cover photo**: Shriji Mandira, Varsana**
Back cover photos: (clockwise from top right) **Madhuvana-kunda, Shantanu-kunda**, **Prema-sarovara, Vimala-kunda, Nandagrama, Brahmanda-Ghata.**

CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

Dedication 2
Preface 12
How to use this Guide Book 13
Guidelines to Observe While Performing Parikrama 13
The Ten Offences to be Avoided in the Holy Dhama 13

INTRODUCTION TO VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA 14

Descriptions of the Transcendental Form of the Supreme Lord 14
Descriptions of the Transcendental Abode of the Supreme Lord 14
When The Lord descends To Earth He Brings His Own Abode 14
The timing of the Lord's Descent 15
Vajranabha Establishes Krishna's Pastime Places in Vraja 15
The Sudden decline of Bhagavata Dharma in India 16
The 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Revives Bhagavata Dharma 16
The Goswamis Rupa and Sanatana Arrive in Vrindavana 17
The Seven Goswami Temples of Vrindavana 18
Shrila Prabhupada Reveals Vrindavana to the Western World 18
The Purpose of Performing Vraja Mandala Parikrama 19
The Spiritual Benefits of Performing Vraja Mandala Parikrama 19
The Geographical Area of Vraja Mandala 20
The Best time to Perform Vraja Mandala Parikrama 21
The Vraja Mandala Parikrama that Starts from Vrindavana 22

START OF VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA 24

BM.1 **VRINDAVANA 24**
Lord Chaitanya's Pilgrimage to Vrindavana 25
The Pancha-kosi Vrindavana Parikrama 26
START OF VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 27
V.1 Ramana Reti / Krishna Balarama Tree 27
V.2 Varaha Ghata 27
V.3 Madana Ter Ghata 27
V.4 Go Ghata / Ram Gol Ghata 28
V.5 Kaliya Ghata 28
V.6 Prabhodananda Saraswati Bhajana Kutira and Samadhi 28
V.7 Prashkandana Ghata / Prashkandana Tirtha 29
V.8 Dwadashaditya Tila / Dwadashaditya Tirtha 29
V.9 Madana-mohana Mandira 29
The Story of Lord Madana-mohana 30
Places of Interest at Madana-mohana Mandira 32
V.9a Bhajana Kutira of Sanatana Goswami 32
V.9b Krishna Kupa 33
V.10 Sanatana Goswami Samadhi 34
V10a Tapan Mishra and Chandrasekhara Acharya Pushpa Samadhis 34
V10b Grantha Samadhi 34
V.11 Advaita Vata 34
V.12 Imli Tala / Tentuli-tala 35
V.13 Shringara Vata / Shringara Ghata 37
V.14 Jaru Mandala 37
V.15 Govinda Ghata 38
V.16 Radha Damodara Mandira 39
Places of Interest at Radha Damodara 40
V.16a Jiva Goswami Samadhi 40
V.16b Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami Samadhi 42
V.16c Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupada Pushpa Samadhi 42
V.16d King Bhirambhir Pushpa Samadhi 43
V.16e Rupa Goswami Bhajana Kutira 44

V.16f Rupa Goswami Samadhi 45
V.16g Bhugarbha Goswami Samadhi 46
V.16h Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada Bhajana Kutira 46
V.17 Seva Kunja (Rasa-sthali) 47
V.18 Radha Shyamasundara Mandira 49
V.18a Shyamananda Tilak Sthana and Samadhi 49
Shyamananda Discovers Radharani's Ankle-bell 49
V.19 Nidhuvana 51
V.20 **C**hira Ghata / Chehana Ghata 52
V.21 Keshi Ghata / Keshi-tirtha 52
The Liberation of the Keshi Demon 52
V.21a Gadadhara Dant Samadhi 53
V.22 Radha Gokulananda Mandira 53
V.22a Lokanatha Goswami Samadhi 54
V.22b Narottama Dasa Thakura Puspa Samadhi 54
V.22c Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura Samadhi 56
V.23 Radharamana Mandira 57
V.23a Gopala Bhatta Goswami Samadhi 58
V.24 Radha Gopinatha Mandira 59
V.25 Dhira Samir / Dhira Samira Ghata 60
V.25a Shrinivasa Acharya Kunja 60
V.25b Radha Shyama-raya Mandira 61
V.25c Radha Kanta Mandira 61
V.26 Vamsi Vata 61
V.27 Gopishwara Mahadeva Mandira 61
V.28 Brahma-kunda 62
V.29 Govindaji Mandira 62
The Tyrant Aurangzeb Attacks the Govindaji Mandira 64
V.30 Sixty-four Samadhis Pitha / Venu Kupa 65
V.30a Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami Samadhi 66
V.31 Pani Ghata 67
V.32 Adi-Bhadri Ghata 68
V.33 Raja Ghata 68
V.34 Chaitanya Baithaka 68
V.35 Davanala-kunda 69
V.36 Radha Kupa 69
V.37 Krishna Balarama Mandira / Ramana Reti 69
END OF VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 71
BM.2 BHOJANA STHALA / YAJNA STHALA 71
BM.3 AKRURA GHATA 72
The Vrajavasi's Vision of Vaikuntha 72
Akrura's Vision of Vaikuntha 72
Krishna's Final Pastime of His Vraja-lila 73
Lord Chaitanya Visits Akrura Ghata 74
BM.4 AMBIKA-KANANA / GOKARNESHWARA 75
Gokarneshwara Mahadeva 75
Saraswati-kunda / Saraswati Mandira 76
Ambika Devi Mandira (Mahavidya Devi) 76
Nanda Maharaja Swallowed by a Serpent at Ambika-kanana 77
BM.5 MATHURA Puri (Mathura) 77
The Ancient History of Mathura 78
The Glories of Mathura Puri 78
The Sacred Ghatas on the River Yamuna 80
MATHURA HALF-PARIKRAMA 81
M.1 Visrama Ghata / Vishranti-tirtha 81
M.2 Yamaraja-Yamuna Mandira 82
M.3 Pippaleshwara Mahadeva Mandira 82
M.4 Dhruva Ghata / Dhruva-tirtha 82

M.5 Sapta-rishi Tila /Rishi-tirtha 83
M.6 Bali Tila 83
M.7 Akrura Bhavana 83
M.8 Kubja Kupa (Kubja's Well) 83
M.9 Ranga-bhumi / Kamsa Tila 84
M.10 Rangeshwara Mahadeva Mandira 84
M.11 Keshava Gaudiya Matha 84
M.12 Shiva Tala 84
M.13 Kankali Mandira / Kankali Tila 85
M.14 Balabhadra-kunda 85
M.15 Bhuteshwara Mahadeva Mandira 86
M.16 Jnana-vapi 86
M.17 Potra-kunda 86
M.18 Prachin-Janmasthana 86
M.19 Krishna Kupa / Maratha Mandira 87
M.20 Keshava Mandira 87
The Appearance of Lord Shri Krishna 87
END OF MATHURA PARIKRAMA 89
BM.6 MADHUVANA (Maholi) 89
How Madhuvana Forest Got Its Name 89
The Madhu Demon Killed at Madhuvana 89
Lord Rama Sends Shatrughna to Madhuvana 90
Lord Shatrughna Vanquishes the Demon Lavanasura 90
Places of Interest at Madhuvana 91
B.1 Krishna-kunda (Madhu-kunda) 91
B.2 Balarama Temple (Dauji Mandira) 92
B.3 Shatrughna Mandira 92
B.4 Dhruva Tila 92
B.5 Madhu Gufa (Cave) 93
BM.7 TALAVAN (Tarsi) 93
The Liberation of Denukasura 94
Places of Interest At Talavana 95
T.1 Sankarshana-kunda 96
T.2 Baladeva Mandira (Dauji Mandira) 96
BM.8 KAMUDAVANA (Kudarban) 96
BM.9 DATIYA (Datiya) 97
The Killing of Dantavakra 97
BM.10 SHANTANU-KUNDA (Satoha) 98
The Story of King Shantanu of Hastinapura 98
BM.11 GANDHESHWARA (Ganeshara) 99
BM.12 KHECHARI (Phainchari) 99
BM.13 BAHULAVANA (Bati) 100
How the Forest of Bahulavana Achieved its Name 100
The Story of Bahula Devi 101
B.1 Bahula Devi Mandira 101
B.2 Sankarshana-kunda and Mana-sarovara 101
The Story of Mana-sarovara 102
Lord Chaitanya Visits Bahulavana 102
BM.14 GARUDA-GOVINDA / SAKATIKARA (Chhatikara) 102
The Garuda-Govinda Mandira 103
The Pastimes of Garuda-Govinda 104
BM.15 MAGHAHERA (Maghera) 104
BM.16 RAYA (Ral) 105
BM.17 JANATI (Junhedi) 105
BM.18 VASATI (Basanti) 105
BM.19 MUKHARAI 106
BM.20 RADHA-KUNDA / SHYAMA-KUNDA 106
The Killing of Arishtasura and the Appearance of Radha-kunda 106
Bahulashtami the Appearance Day of Radha-kunda 107
The Benefits of Bathing at Radha-kunda 108
Taking Caution when Bathing at Radha-kunda 108
The Pratibhu Murtis at Radha-kunda 109
The Seven Goswami Temples at Radha-kunda 109
Performing Radha-kunda Parikrama 109
START OF RADHA_KUNDA PARIKRAMA 110
R.1 Kundeshwara Mahadeva Mandira 110
R.2 Radha Krishna Purana Mandira 110
R.3 Jhulana Sthali 111

R.4 Gopala Manipura Mandira 111
R.5 Radha Kanta Mandira 111
R.6 Radha Shyamasundara Mandira 111
R.7 Radha Damodara Mandira 112
R.8 Shrinivasa Acharya Kunja 112
R.9 Radha Gopinatha Mandira 112
R.10 Jahnava Mata Baithaka 113
R.11 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami Samadhi 113
R.12 Radharamana Mandira 114
R.13 Radha Govinda Mandira 114
R.14 Jihva Mandira 114
R.15 Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami Bhajana Kutira 115
R.16 Raghnatha Dasa Goswami Bhajana Kutira 115
R.17 Vishvanatha Chakravarti Bhajana Kutira 117
R.18 Teen Goswami Samadhi 119
R.19 Gopala Bhatta Goswami Bhajana Kutira 120
R.20 Manasa-pavana Ghata 120
R.21 Pancha Pandava Ghata 120
R.22 Bhaktivinoda Thakura Bhajana Kutira 121
R.23 Jiva Goswami Bhajana Kutira 122
R.24 Lalita-kunda 122
R25 Radha Vinoda Mandira 123
R.26 Madhavendra Puri Baithaka 123
R.27 Gopi Kupa 123
R.28 Radha Madhava Mandira 123
R.29 Chaitanya Baithaka 123
R.30 Madana-mohana Mandira / Sanatana Goswami Baithaka 124
R.31 Sangama / Charana-chinha 125
R.32 Imli Tala 125
R.33 Nityananda Baithaka 126
R.34 Radha Gopinatha Mandira 126
R.35 Radha Gokulananda Mandira 127
The Tradition of Bathing at the End of Radha-kunda Parikrama 127
END OF RADHA-KUNDA PARIKRAMA 127
BM.21 GOVARDHANA HILL 127
The Appearance of Govardhana Hill 128
The Lifting of Govardhana Hill 128
START OF GOVARDHANA PARIKRAMA 129
G.1 Kusuma-sarovara 129
G.2 Ashokavana / Pushpavana 130
G.3 Uddhava Baithaka 132
G.4 Narada-kunda /Naradavana 132
G.5 Shyama Kuti 132
G.6 Gwala Pokhara 133
G.6a Yugala-kunda 133
G.6b Kilola-kunda 133
G.7 Manasi-ganga 133
G.8 Harideva Mandira 135
G.9 Manasi Devi Mandira 135
G.10 Brahma-kunda 136
G.11 Mukharavinda 136
G.12 Chakra-tirtha 136
G.13 Sanatana Goswami Bhajana Kutira 136
G.14 Chakreshwara Mahadava Mandira 137
G.15 Dana Ghati / Krishna-vedi 137
G.16 Radha's Lotus Footprint 138
G.17 Dana-nirvartana-kunda 138
G.18 Annakuta-ksetra 138
G.19 Aniyora 138
G.19a Sankarshana Mandira 139
G.19b Gopala Prakata Sthali 139
G.20 Sankarshana-kunda 139
G.21 Gauri-kunda / Gauri Tirtha 139
G.22 Govinda-kunda 140
G.22a Madhavendra Puri Bhajana Kutira 141
G.22b Gopala Mandira 142
G.22c Indra Tila 142
G.22d Radha Govinda Mandira 142
G.22e Nipa-kunda 142

G.22f Gandharva-kunda 142
G.23 Balarama-sthali / Doka Dauji 143
G.24 Punchari / Tail of Govardhana 143
G.25 Apsara-kunda / Navala-kunda 143
G.25a Narasingha Mandira 144
G.25b Punchari / Lotha Baba Mandira 144
G.25c Apsara-bihari Mandira 144
G.26 Sutalavana / Rasa-sthali 144
G.26a Sutala-kunda 145
G.27 Raghava Pandita's Cave / Mani Kundali Gufa 145
G.28 Airavata's Footprint 145
G.29 Indra Puja 145
G.29a Indra-kunda 146
G.30 Kadambavana / Kadamba-khandi 146
G.30a Surabhi-kunda 146
G.30b Airavata-kunda 146
G.30c Rudan-kunda 146
G.31 Yatipura (Jetipura) 146
G.32 Vilachu-kunda 147
G.33 Shakhisthali 147
G.34 Uddhava-kunda 148
G.35 Shiva Khor 148
G.36 Malyahari-kunda 148
G.37 Radha Kunja-bihari Mandira 149
G.38 Radha-kunda 149
G.39 Papa-mochana-kunda / Rina-mochana-kunda 149
G.40 Indra-dhwaja-vedi 149
BM.22 PARASAULI (Mohammadpur) 149
BM.23 CHANDRA-SAROVARA 151
BM.24 PAITHA (Petha) 151
BM.25 SHYAMA DAKA (Shyamadhak) 152
BM.26 GULALA-KUNDA 152
BM.27 GANTHULI (Gantholi) 153
Lord Chaitanya visits Ganthuli Grama 153
BM.28 RAHEJA (Bahaj) 154
BM.29 DIRGHAPURA (Dig) 154
BM.30 DIDAVALI 155
BM.31 KHONHA (Khoh) 155
BM.32 SHANARA SHIKAR (Kadamba Khandi) 155
BM.33 ADIBADRI GRAMA (Alipura) 155
BM.34 ADI BADRINATHA 156
The Apsaras Tempt Nara-Narayana Rishi 157
Lord Krishna Visits Badrinatha with Nanda Maharaja 158
BM.35 PASOPA (Parsopa) 158
BM.36 KEDARANATHA 159
BM.37 CHARANA PAHADI 159
BM.38 LUKLUKANA-MICALI (Luk-luki-kunda) 160
BM.39 KAMYAVANA (Kaman) 160
START OF KAMYAVANA INTERIOR PARIKRAMA 162
K.1 Govindaji and Vrinda Devi Temple 162
K.2 Madana-mohana Temple 162
K.3 Gopinatha Temple 163
K.4 Chaurasi Khamba 163
K.5 Vishnu Simhasana 163
K.6 Vimala-kunda 163
The Appearance of Vimala-kunda 164
Durvasa Muni Visits the Pandavas at Kamyavana 164
K.7 Karmeshwara Mahadeva Mandira 165
K.8 Pancha Pandava Mandira 165
K.9 Dharma-kunda (Pancha Pandava-kunda) 165
A Yaksha Tests Yudhisthira Maharaja 166
K.10 Chandra-sarovara 167
K.11 Yashoda-kunda 167
K.12 Rameshwara Setubandha 167
K.13 Gaya-Kunda 168
START OF KAMYAVANA EXTERIOR PARIKRAMA 168
BM.40 SURABHI-KUNDA / Bhajana Kutira of Prabhodananda 168
BM.41 PICHALINI-SHILA (Kalavati) 169
BM.42 VYOMASURA GUFA 169

BM.43 BALARAMA CHARANA-CHINHA 171
BM.44 BHOJANA THALI 171
END OF KAMYAVANA EXTERNAL PARIKRAMA 171
BM.45 KANOYARO GRAMA (Kanvara) 171
BM.46 KADAMBA KHANDI 172
BM.47 SVARNAHARA (Sunhera) 173
BM.48 UNCAGRAMA (Uchagaon) 173
START OF UNCAGRAMA PARIKRAMA 173
U.1 Lalita-sakhi Mandira (Atora Parvata) 173
U.2 Dauji Mandira 174
U.3 Triveni Kupa 175
U.4 Narayana Bhatta Samadhi 175
U.5 Deha-kunda 175
U.6 Venisankara Mahadeva 175
U.7 Sakhigiri Parvata (Alta Pahadi) 176
U.8 Chapan Katori 176
U.9 Chitra-vichitra Silakhanda 176
U.10 Lalita-vivaha Mandapa 176
U.11 Phishalni-shila 176
U.12 Gopi Pushkarini 177
U.13 Sakhi Kupa 177
END OF UNCHAGRAMA PARIKRAMA 177
BM.49 VARSANA (Barsana) 177
A Description of Radharani's Exquisite Beauty 178
START OF VARSANA PARIKRAMA 178
V.1 Sriji Mandira 178
V.2 Vrishabhanu-kunda 178
V.3 Kirtida-kunda 180
V.4 Vrajeshwara Mahadeva Mandira 180
V.5 Sankari Khora 180
V.6 Vilasa Garh 180
V.7 Chitrashali (Ciksauli) 181
V.8 Dohani-kunda 181
V.9 Krishna-kunda/ Gahvaravana 181
V.10 Mayura Kutira (Mor Kuti) 181
V.11 Mana Garh 182
V.12 Dana Garh (Dana Mal) 183
V.13 Kushala Bihari Mandira (Jaipura Temple) 183
V.14 Piyala-sarovara (Pili Pokhara) 183
END OF VARSANA PARIKRAMA
BM.50 PREMA-SAROVARA 183
BM.51 SANKET (Sanket Grama) 184
BM.52 NANDAGRAMA (Nandgoan) 185
Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Visits Nandagrama 187
START OF NANDAGRAMA PARIKRAMA 187
N.1 Nanda Bhavana / Krishna Balarama Mandira 187
N.2 Nandishwara Mahadeva 188
N.3 Dadhi Manthana (Yogurt Pot) 189
N.4 Narasingha Deva Mandira 189
N.5 Yashoda-kunda 189
N.6 Nanda Baba's Goshala 189
N.7 Hau Bilau 189
N.8 Nanda-kunda / Nanda Baithaka 190
N.9 Madhusudana-kunda 190
N.10 Karela-kunda 190
N.11 Charana Pahadi 190
N.12 Panihari-kunda 190
N.13 Gedukhora 190
N.14 Vrinda-kunda 190
N.15 Gupta-kunda 191
N.16 Pavana-sarovara 191
N.17 Pavana-bihari Mandira 193
N.18 Sanatana Goswami Bhajana Kutira 193
N.19 Rohini-kunda 194
N.20 Ksunnahara-kunda (Tadaga-tirtha) 194
N.21 Mukta-kunda (Moti-kunda) 194
N.22 Phulwali-kunda 196
N.23 Sahasi-kunda (Sarasika-kunda) 196
N.24 Ter Kadamba 196

N.25 Rupa Goswami Bhajana Kutira 196
N.26 Ashiseshvara Mahadeva Mandira 197
N.27 Nanda Maharaja Bagicha 197
N.28 Kokeshwara-kunda 198
N.29 Krishna-kunda 198
N.30 Yogiya-sthana 198
N.31 Jhagadaki-kunda (Chach-kunda) 198
N.32 Akrura-sthana 198
N.33 Domanavana 199
N.34 Purnamasi-kunda 199
N.35 Uddhava Kyari (Udho-kriya-sthana) 199
N.36 Vishakha-kunda 200
N.37 Lalita-kunda 200
N.38 Narada-kunda 201
N.39 Surya-kunda 201
END OF NANDAGRAMA PARIKRAMA 201
BM.53 KHADIRAVANA (Khayara) 202
The Killing of Bakasura 202
BM.54 YAVAT (Jao) 202
Philisophical Considerations Regarding Parakiya-rasa 203
J.1 Jatila ki Haveli (Jatila's House) 204
Pastime places near Jatila ki Haveli-no longer visible 204
J.1a Beriya 204
J.1b Vatsakhora (Kidaka) 204
J.1c Kutila-dushana-sthana 206
J.1d Padmavati Vivaha Sthali 206
J.1e Panihari-kunda 206
J.1f Pivana-kunda 206
J.1g Mukta-kunda 206
J.1h Krishna-kunda 206
J.1i Ladali-kunda 206
J.1j Narada-kunda 207
Other Places of Interest at Yavata 207
J.2 Kishori Vata (Yavaka Vata) 207
J.3 Kishori-kunda 207
J.4 Rasa-mandala 207
J.5 Parala-kunda (Piyala-kunda) 207
J.6 Charana-Kunda (Charana-ganga) 207
J.7 Radhika-gamana-patha 208
BM.55 KOKILAVANA 208
BM.56 BADA BAITHANA (Bathain Kalan) 208
BM.57 CHOTA BATHAIN (Bathain Kurd) 209
BM.58 CHARANA PAHADI 209
BM.59 KOTARAVANA (Kotban) 209
BM.60 SESHASHAYI (Shernagar) 210
BM.61 PAYA GRAMA (Paigoan) 211
BM.62 KHELANAVANA (Shergarh) 211
BM.63 RAMA GHATA 212
BM.64 VIHARAVANA 213
BM.65 AKSHAYA VATA (Kajarotha) 213
Radha and Krishna's Pastimes at Bhandira Vata 214
The Slaying of Pralambhasura at Bhandira Vat 215
BM.66 TAPOVANA (Gopi Ghata) 215
BM.67 CHIRA GHATA (Siyaro) 215
BM.68 GANGRAULI 216
BM.69 NANDA GHATA (Baigram) 216
Jiva Goswami's stay at Nanda Ghata 217
BM.70 BHADRAVANA 218
BM.71 BHANDIRAVANA (Chhanhari) 219
Places of Interest at Bhandiravana 220
B.1 Venu Kupa (Bhandira Kupa) 220
B.2 Balarama Mukut 221
B.3 Baladeva Mandira (Dauji Mandira) 221
B.4 Bhandira Vata 221
The Marriage Ceremony of Radha and Krishna 221

Philosophical considerations Regarding the Marriage of Radha and Krishna 223
B.5 Vamsi Vata (Shridama Vata) 224
B.6 Shridama Mandira 224
B.7 Shyama Tala 224
BM.72 MATHA (Mat) 224
BM.73 KRISHNA-KUNDA (Dangauli) 226
BM.74 BILVAVANA (Belvana) 226
The Story of Goddess Lakshmi and Her Penance at Bilvavana 226
BM.75 MANA-SAROVARA 228
BM.76 PANIGAON 228
BM.77 LAUHAVANA (Lohban) 229
Krishna's Boating Pastimes at Lauhavana 230
BM.78 VANDI ANANDI (Bandi) 231
BM.79 DAUJI (Baldev) 232
BM.80 CHINTAHARANA GHATA 233
BM.82 BRAHMANDA GHATA 234
BM.82 GOKULA (Mahavana)235
Places of Interest At Mahavana 235
M.1 Chaurasi Khambha / Ananda Bhavana 235
M.2 Sanatana Goswami Gufa and Bhajana-sthala / Patala Devi Mandira 236
M.3 Sakata-bhanjana-sthana 237
M.4 Trinavarta-badha-sthala 237
M.5 Putana-udhara-sthala 238
M.6 Yashoda Bhavana / Yogamaya Mandira 238
M.7 Danta-dhavana Tila 239
M.8 Nanda ki Haveli 239
M.9 Malla Tirtha
M.10 Nanda's Goshala
M.11 Chore Ghata 240
M.12 Dadhi-manthana-sthala 240
M.13 Nanda Kupa / Sapta-samudra Kupa 240
M.14 Yamalarjuna-bhanjana-tirtha / Utkhal 240
The Damodara-*lila* Pastime 240
BM.83 RAMANAKA (Raman Reti) 242
BM.84 RAVALA 242
The Appearance of Shrimati Radharani 243
M.1 **Vishrama Ghata 244**
END OF VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA 244
GLOSSARY 245
Chronology of Important Events in the History of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya 249
Chronology of Important Events in the Life of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada 250
BIBLIOGRAPHY 251
INDEX OF MAPS 252
About the Author 252
Other books by the same author 253

PREFACE

After the completion of our first three books on the subject of the holy Dhama, including the guides to Vrindavana, Govardhana Hill, and Radha-kunda, which were very well received by the Vaishnava community, we were requested by devotees for a comprehensive guide to Vraja Mandala and therefore began extensive research for this edition focusing on the famous *Vana-yatra* or Vraja Mandala Parikrama. This particular *parikrama* which circumambulates the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana Dhama was first inaugurated by the 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the year 1515 AD., when He traveled on foot to the twelve sacred forests and visited all the important holy places where Lord Krishna had performed His transcendental pastimes five thousand years earlier. This historic *parikrama* performed by Lord Chaitanya, directly led to the great revival of the 'devotional *bhakti* movement' in India and the rediscovery of the holy land of Vrindavana, which is now the sub-continent's most important pilgrimage centre, not only for Indians who flock to Vrindavana in large numbers, but for the ever-increasing number of foreign converts to Vaishnava Dharma, who arrive there on pilgrimage from every corner of the world.

The famous *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala performed by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was recorded in a number of important books, including the highly acclaimed *Chaitanya-charitamrta* by Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami completed in 1581 AD., and the *Bhakti-ratnakara* by Narahari Chakravarti Thakura, written during the same period, which gives a vivid account of the Vraja Mandala Parikrama undertaken by Raghava Pandita Goswami, Shrinivasa Acharya, and Narottama Dasa Thakura, who retraced the same route originally taken by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Besides these two literary gems, the innumerable books written by the Six Goswamis, who were the first to excavate the lost holy places of Vrindavana Dhama, also provide invaluable information about the location of the various *tirthas* and the pastimes that were enacted there.

Although the histories and locations of the many holy places of Vrindavana Dhama are often shrouded in mystery and in the course of time they have become distorted or changed, it is always our concerted endeavor to establish the truth based on the traditional system of evidence followed by all Gaudiya Vaishnava scholars. The three forms of evidence or *pramana* that have been accepted by Shrila Rupa Goswami, Lord Chaitanya's most important disciple during his own research and writings on Vraja are as follows. The first is *shastra-pramana*, or evidence based upon the revealed Vedic scriptures. The second is *sadhu-pramana*, or evidence revealed through the empowered writings and teachings of various Gaudiya Vaishnava saints. The third is *loka-pramana*, or evidence handed down through oral tradition by generations of local *Vrajavasi* people. The establishment of *pramana* is vitally important to all Gaudiya Vaishnavas so that when reading about the glories of the holy Dhama, or visiting the innumerable *tirthas* situated there, they can do so while having complete faith in the accuracy of the stories and correct locations of all the *lila-sthanas* connected to Lord Krishna's transcendental pastimes on earth.

Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari
Vrindavana,
Karttika, 2011

How to Use This Guide Book

The important holy places on the Vraja Mandala Parikrama route are numbered BM.1 to BM.82 and the ancient name of each holy place is shown in bold caps, followed in brackets by the present-day name of that place, which is also used in the maps displayed in this book. The detailed directions of how to reach each holy place is mentioned under the heading; **How To Get There** - including the map reference number and on which page to find the map. These directions are especially helpful for those who wish to visit the individual holy places around Vraja Mandala by road.

Guidelines to Observe While Performing Parikrama

A. One should always offer respect to the temple deities, as well as to the cows, Vaishnavas, *brahmanas*, local residents, sacred trees, plants, *kundas*, and any other living entity, moving or none-moving, within the holy Dhama.
B. One should not become angry, curse, or offend any person or any living entity, while on *parikrama*, otherwise the benefits of the *parikrama* can be lost.
C. When entering temples one should not wear shoes or leather items and one's clothing should be freshly washed. It is also recommended not to wear shoes when on *parikrama*.
D. Before performing *parikrama* one should bathe and clean ones mouth and teeth and one should also observe celibacy.
E. One should not perform *parikrama* at night.
F. While walking on *parikrama* one must avoid crushing or injuring tiny living entities on the path.
G. If one becomes sick while on *parikrama* one should rest and continue *parikrama* later.
H. One should not leave *parikrama* uncompleted.

The Ten Offences to be Avoided in the Holy Dhama.

1. To have disrespect or contempt for the *acharya* or guru who is the revealer of the holy Dhama
2. To think that the holy Dhama is temporary.
3. To commit violence towards anyone in the holy Dhama and to think that the residents or pilgrims visiting the Dhama are ordinary mundane people.
4. To perform mundane activities while living in the holy Dhama.
5. To earn money or make a business from deity worship or chanting the holy names of the Lord.
6. To think that the holy Dhama belongs to some mundane country or province, or to think that the holy Dhama is equal to other holy places connected to the demigods, or to try to estimate the area of the Dhama by some mundane mechanism.
7. To commit sinful activities in the holy Dhama.
8. To consider Vrindavana and Navadwipa to be different.
9. To blaspheme the Vedic scriptures that glorifies the holy Dhama.
10. To be faithless and to think that the glories of the holy Dhama are imaginary.

INTRODUCTION TO VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA

Descriptions of the Transcendental Form of the Supreme Lord

The most famous description of Lord Shri Krishna is found in the *Brahma-samhita* and composed by Prajapati Brahma, who was the first recipient of Vedic knowledge and from whose mouth the four Vedas originally became manifest;

"Krishna who is known as Govinda is the Supreme Personality of Godhead who possesses an eternal spiritual body. He is the origin of all and has no other origin, and is therefore the cause of all causes. I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor who is tending the cows, yielding all desire in abodes built with spiritual gemstones, surrounded by millions of desire trees, always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds and thousands of Laksmis or goddesses of fortune. I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, who is adept at playing on His flute, who has blossoming eyes like lotus petals, whose head is bedecked with a peacock's feather, who possesses a figure of exquisite beauty, and whose complexion is tinged with the hue of blue clouds, and whose unique loveliness is charming millions of Cupids. I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, around whose neck is a garland of forest flowers beautified with a moon-locket, whose two hands, adorned with jeweled ornaments, is holding His transcendental flute, and who always revels in pastimes of divine love, and whose graceful three-fold bending form of Shyamasundara is eternally manifest."

Descriptions of the Transcendental Abode of the Supreme Lord

The holy Dhama of Goloka Vrindavana also called Swetadwipa, which is the eternal abode of the Supreme Lord, being completely spiritual in nature, is also non-different from the Lord Himself, just as the Lord's name, form, and attributes are also non-different from Him. A description of the Lord's eternal abode of Gokula Vrindavana which is also called Vraja Vrindavana is found in the *Brahma-samhita;*

"I worship that transcendental abode known as Swetadwipa, where the goddesses of fortune known as *gopis*, in their unalloyed spiritual essence, engage in the amorous service of Lord Shri Krishna who is their only lover; where every tree is a transcendental desire tree, where the earth is made of wish-fulfilling gemstones, where all water is nectar, every word is a song, every gait is a dance, where the flute is the Lord's favored companion, where the atmosphere is full of transcendental bliss; where numberless Surabhi cows provide transcendental oceans of milk; where there is eternal existence of transcendental time, which is ever present and without past or future, and thus not subject to the quality of passing away, not even for a moment. That transcendental realm of Goloka is known to only a very few self-realized souls in this world."

When the Lord Descends to Earth He Brings His Own Abode

The Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Shri Krishna resides on the planet known as Goloka. The word Goloka means the planet (loka) of cows (go). This transcendental planet is situated in the far distant spiritual sky, but when the Lord desires to appear on earth with His eternal associates, the *gopis* and g*opas*, He first manifests on the earthly plain His own spiritual abode where He will enact His transcendental pastimes for the benefit of the world. That abode of the Lord, when manifested on earth is called Gokula. The word 'Gokula' means the home *(kula*) of the cows *(go*). The spiritual abode of the Lord is also called Vrindavana which means forest (*vana*) of Vrinda (goddess of the forest) who has manifested in the form of the forest as its flora and fauna and specifically as the sacred *vrinda* trees, also called *tulasi* trees. This transcendental realm of Gokula-Vrindavana, which is also called the holy Dhama (sacred abode), covers an approximate area of *chaurasi-kosa* or 168 miles in diameter, which is referred to as Vraja Mandala. The word 'Vraja Mandala' means the area (*mandala*) of

Gokula-Vrindavana, which encompasses twelve sacred forests and innumerable rivers, lakes, hills, groves, and gardens. This entire realm is completely spiritual and is non-different from the original Goloka in the spiritual world, even though it exists within the material world.

The name Vraja Mandala specifically refers to the actual geographical area of the Lord's earthly abode of Gokula Vrindavana, which is demarcated by precise boundaries and can be easily located on a map of the world. Therefore, anyone from any place on earth can visit this transcendental abode of the Lord at any time. This is one of the reasons why Lord Krishna has manifested His abode on the earthly plain, so that those who wish to become His devotees and surrender their lives to Him can go there and experience His transcendental presence and visit the places of His transcendental pastimes, even long after He has returned to the spiritual world. Another reason for manifesting this abode on earth is to give information to the fallen souls that there is another world, where the Lord and His devotees enjoy eternal life, completely free from all the pain and misery associated with life in this world of repeated birth, old age, disease, and death.

The Timing of the Lord's Descent on Earth

Five thousand years ago, at the time of Lord Krishna's descent to the earthly plain, the world was being overrun by powerful demons in the form of impious and cruel kings, who were building up huge military forces for the purpose of world domination. The innocent people of the world were suffering under the yoke of these irreligious kings and were fervently praying for the Lord to save them. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna has personally said. **"In order to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I descend to earth millennium after millennium."** Therefore, this is another reason for the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Shri Krishna, to appear on earth, when there is a general decline in piety and religion and the devotees of the Lord find themselves being persecuted. At that time, Lord Krishna comes to earth in His transcendental spiritual form, and in order to save His beloved devotees as well as all innocent human beings, He is forced to kill all the demonic persons that are creating such disturbances. Nevertheless, by His unfathomable mercy, all the demons that He kills, automatically achieve liberation and go to heaven. After the Lord had exhibited His transcendental pastimes on earth for a period of one hundred and twenty-five years, and after annihilating all the demons, as well as having reestablished the principles of pure religion, He returned to His eternal abode, the planet of Goloka in the spiritual world.

Vajranabha Establishes Krishna's Pastime Places in Vraja

The *Mahabharata* says that after Lord Krishna's disappearance from the world, the Pandavas also retired from their royal duties at Hastinapura and departed for the Himalayas. At that time, Yudisthira Maharaja appointed Lord Krishna's great grandson, Vajranabha Maharaja as the king of Mathura. Vajranabha Maharaja was the son of the great hero Aniruddha, the son of Pradyumna, who was the son of Lord Krishna and Queen Rukmini, thus making Vajranabha the only direct relative of Krishna left on the planet. As soon as Vajranabha Maharaja was enthroned at Mathura, many of Lord Krishna's great devotees, who were all feeling the pangs of the Lord's separation, requested Vajranabha to establish temples and holy *tirthas* at all the places throughout Vraja Mandala where Lord Krishna had performed His transcendental pastimes. Vajranabha readily agreed and being guided by scriptures like the *Adi-Varaha Purana*, he identified and named every forest, grove, garden, lake, *kunda*, hill, rock, and village, connected to Krishna's pastimes within the entire area of Vraja Mandala.

It is said that Vajranabha installed at least sixteen very important deities at various places around Vraja Mandala. The first deities were established in the forest of Vrindavana and included; Madana-mohana, Govindaji, Gopinatha, and Sakshi-Gopala. Other deities installed at various places around Vraja included; Keshavadeva in Mathura, Harideva next to Manasi-ganga at Govardhana, Shrinathaji (Gopala) at Aniyora Village on top of Govardhana Hill, and the deity of Krishna's elder brother Lord Balarama (also known as Dauji or Baladeva) at Mahavana. Vajranabha also established four Shiva-*lingas* known as the *dig-*

palas, or protectors of the holy Dhama including; Bhuteshwara at Mathura, Gopishwara in Vrindavana, Cakreshwara at Govardhana Hill, and Kameshwara at Kamyavana. Vajranabha also established four deities of Krishna's sister Yogamaya Devi, which are known as the four *devis* of Vraja and included; Yogamaya Devi presently at the Yoga-pitha in Vrindavana, Vrinda Devi presently at Kamyavana, Manasi Devi at Govardhana, and Patala Devi in Mathura. Due to the turmoil that unfolded over the next five thousand years, with the ever-changing socio-political scenario, almost all of the holy places and deities established by Vajranabha were either hidden, abandoned, looted, or just forgotten.

The Sudden decline of Bhagavata Dharma in India

From around 500 BC., the invasion of India began, first with the Persians under Darius, then the Greeks under Alexander, then the Syrians under Seleucus Nicator, and the whole of the North-west frontier of India was eventually overrun. The Greco-Bactrian's under Menander were the first to move southwards into the Indian heart-land and captured Mathura in 150 BC. Then around 140 BC., hordes of nomadic tribesmen known as Sakas overthrew the Greco-Bactrian Empire in Northern India and also captured Mathura. Another nomadic tribe known as the Kushans under Kanishka, defeated the Sakas and by 50 BC., conquered the whole of North India and Mathura became the southern capital of the Kushan Empire. The Kushan kings converted to Buddhism and Mathura was converted into a major centre of Buddhist learning and culture, with many ancient holy places being turned into Buddhist shrines and monasteries. By the turn of the 5TH Century, the great Hindu king, Vikramaditya, drove out the Kushans and other invaders and reestablished control over the whole of Northern India from the Ganges Delta to the Hindu Kush; he also re-took the city of Mathura and rebuilt the Keshava Temple that had previously been destroyed by the invaders. Unfortunately, peace did not last and within a few hundred years the invasions of India began once again with even greater ferocity, as the Huns, Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Pathans, and then the Mughals conquered India.

The 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Revives Bhagavata Dharma

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared on earth in the year 1486, and He is mentioned in the Vedas to be a direct incarnation of Lord Krishna known as the 'Golden Avatara', because of His golden colored complexion. His mission on earth was to revive Bhagavata Dharma and introduce the religion for the new age, which is the *sankirtana-yajna* or the congregational chanting of God's holy names'. He specifically propounded the chanting of the 'Hare Krishna Maha-Mantra', also known as the great chant of deliverance and the most sublime process of purification in the modern age of Kali-*yuga*. As part of this revival, His mission was to rediscover the holy land of Vrindavana where Lord Krishna had performed His transcendental pastimes five thousand years earlier.

After accepting the *sannyasa* order in 1510, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed at Jagannatha Puri where He performed *sankirtana* every day, but He always had the ardent desire to visit Vrindavana and see the places of Krishna's transcendental pastimes situated around Vraja Mandala. Lord Chaitanya also wanted to rediscover all the pastime places that had been lost over time and also reestablish the important deities of Vrindavana that were previously installed by Krishna's great grandson, Vajranabha Maharaja. It is said that Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu arrived in Vrindavana Dhama in the month of *Ashwina,* corresponding to the middle of September in the year 1515, some say believe it was one month later on Karttik-p*urnima*. On arrival at Mathura, He first bathed in the Yamuna River at Vishrama Ghata and then went to Krishna's birthplace and also took *darshana* of Lord Keshavadeva. Lord Chaitanya stayed in Mathura for a few days and besides visiting all the holy places within the city, He also bathed in all twenty four sacred *ghatas* along the banks of the Yamuna River.

Lord Chaitanya then started on His *parikrama* around Vraja Mandala with the intention to visit the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana where Krishna had performed His transcendental pastime five thousand years earlier. Accompanied by His assistant Balabhadra Bhattacharya, Lord Chaitanya first visited the forest of Madhuvana, and then

gradually traveled on foot to each of the sacred forests, first on the western side of the Yamuna, and then the eastern side, which took Him about a month to complete. After visiting Mahavana and Ravala, Lord Chaitanya arrived at the sacred forest of Vrindavana, where He became immersed in *bhajana* and continued to stay there for over a month.

During His travels around Vraja Mandala, Lord Chaitanya rediscovered a number of important holy places, but His most important discovery was the sacred lake known as Radha-kunda, which was Shrimati Radharani's most confidential bathing place and where She enjoyed some of Her most intimate loving pastimes with Krishna. At Nandagrama, Lord Chaitanya also discovered the deities of Nanda and Yashoda and a small deity of Krishna, hidden inside a cave on Nandishwara Hill. After completing His *parikrama* of Vraja, Lord Chaitanya stayed in Vrindavana for one month where He went every day to Imli Tala and chanted *japa* on His beads while contemplating the transcendental pastimes of Radha and Krishna.

During Lord Chaitanya's *parikrama* around the holy places of Vraja, the intense fire of *Radha-bhava* gradually ignited within the Lord's heart and by the time He returned to Jagannatha Puri, He appeared to be a different person, being consumed day and night in the transcendental emotional feelings of Radha's mood of divine love in separation from Krishna. This intense mood of love in separation, which is known as *vipralamba-bhava*, is considered to be the highest perfectional stage of *prema-bhakti* or pure devotional service to Lord Shri Krishna.

After Lord Chaitanya had completed His stay in the holy land of Vrindavana, while on His return journey to Jagannath Puri, He met His two senior-most disciples Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis. Lord Chaitanya ordered Rupa and Sanatana to spend the rest of their lives in Vrindavana and gave them specific instructions to locate all the lost holy places around Vraja Mandala. Lord Chaitanya also gave them instructions on how to develop Vrindavana into an important centre for spreading the *sankirtana* movement and the message of Krishna consciousness around the world.

The Goswamis Rupa and Sanatana Arrive in Vrindavana

The great revival of *Bhagavata Dharma* in India started with the rediscovery of Vrindavana by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and this led to the rapid spread of the Krishna-*bhakti* movement throughout the Indian sub-continent and then eventually to the rest of the world. This was made possible due to the unprecedented contribution made by the celebrated disciples of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, known as the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana. The arrival in Vrindavana of Lord Chaitanya's senior-most disciples, Rupa and Sanatana Gosvamis, proved to be a watershed in the history of Vrindavana, and the extraordinary work undertaken by them, consolidated the great revival of Bhagavata Dharma started by Lord Chaitanya. During their lifetime they established many important temples in Vrindavana, and excavated innumerable holy places around Vraja Mandala. Rupa and Sanatana also led the way in reviving the divine art of *bhakti-yoga*, the highest form of all yoga practice, by writing the basic law books on the scientific process of *sadhana-bhakti*, that explain the esoteric principles of unalloyed devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Shri Krishna.

After receiving direct instructions from Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to excavate Vrindavana's lost holy places, establish temples, and write books on the science of devotion, Rupa and Sanatana were helped in their task by four other important disciples of Lord Chaitanya including; Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, and Jiva Gosvami. Along with Rupa and Sanatana, these *sannyasi* disciples of Lord Chaitanya became famous as the 'Six Goswamis of Vrindavana', and between them they established the precepts and the teachings introduced by Lord Chaitanya. They exclusively propagated devotional service and the chanting of the holy names of God as the only means in the age of Kali-*yuga*, to achieve complete liberation from material suffering and the repetition of birth and death.

The Six Goswamis of Vrindavana were also responsible for establishing the Gaudiya Vaisnava *sampradaya* that was founded exclusively upon Lord Chaitanya's unique

philosophical presentation of the ancient Vedic scriptures. The Goswamis were the first to introduce into the mainstream of religious life in India, the worship of Shrimati Radharani as the consort of Lord Shri Krishna, and they established a number of important temples in Vrindavana that became pivotal in galvanizing the masses behind the Krishna consciousness movement. Prior to the Six Goswamis, there were no temples of Radha-Krishna anywhere in India, but due to their efforts, there are now temples of Radha-Krishna all around the globe. The six Goswamis were supported in their mission by a number of important followers of Lord Chaitanya, including Lokanatha Goswami Bhugharbha Goswami, Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, Shyamananda Pandita, Narottama Dasa Thakura, Shrinivasa Acharya, Madhu Pandita Goswami, Prabhodananda Saraswati Goswami, Raghava Pandita, and others, who are all collectively known as the Gaudiya Goswamis of Vrindavana. A total of seven important temples were established in Vrindavana by the Gaudiya Goswamis that have now famous throughout the world.

The Seven Goswami Temples of Vrindavana

TEMPLE NAME	TEMPLE FOUNDER
Radha Madana-mohana Mandira	Sanatana Goswami
Radha Govinda Mandira (Govindaji)	Rupa Goswami
Radharamana	Gopala Bhatta Goswami
Radha Damodara Mandira	Jiva Goswami
Radha Shyamasundara Mandira	Shyamananda Pandita Goswami
Radha Gokulananda Mandira	Lokanatha Goswami
Radha Gopinatha Mandira	Madhu Pandita Goswami

Shrila Prabhupada Reveals Vrindavana to the World

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the 'Hare Krishna Movement', became the first Vaishnava *acharya* in the history of the world to travel to the West and convert Americanna and Europeans to the religion of pure Bhagavata Dharma also kown as Krishna Consciousness. After traveling to America in 1965, He established hundreds of Radha-Krishna temples, not only in America but around the globe, and translated into the English language for the first time a large volume of books on the subject of Vedic culture and religion, including the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* and *Chaitanya-charitamrta*. His unique translation of the celebrated *Bhagavad Gita* became the best selling edition of the *Gita* in the whole world and his books are highly appreciated by scholars, educators, and academicians the world over.

Shrila Prabhupada was also the first Vaishnava *acharya* to introduce Westerners to the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, when in 1972, he arrived from America with a large party of Europeans and American devotees and personally took them to all the important holy places around Vraja Mandala including; Vrindavana, Govardhana Hill, Radha-kunda, Varsana, Nandagrama, and Gokula. He later established the famous Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana, where his foreign disciples could visit on pilgrimage and become purified of Material contamination and spend time appreciating the transcendentally surcharged atmosphere of the holy Dhama, while engaging in yoga, meditation, chanting Krishna's holy names, and also perform *parikrama*.

In November 1977, during the last few days of his life, as Shrila Prabhupada lay ill in his rooms at the Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana, even though in a precarious state of health, he desired to be taken on *parikrama* to Govardhana Hill and requested that his disciples bring a bullock cart in which he could travel to the various holy places. When a number of senior disciple's objected saying that the ride would kill him, he challenged them saying that *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill would in fact give him life. Shrila Prabhupada also said that it was far better to die while on *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill, than to die while lying in bed, as it would be a far more glorious death. However, his senior disciples refused to allow him to go, in fear he would die at the first bump in the road.

On the third day after *Govardhana-puja*, which is the celebration of Krishna's pastime of lifting Govardhana Hill, Shrila Prabhupada breathed his last and entered into *maha-samadhi* and the eternal pastimes of Krishna's Vraja-*lila*. In order to fulfill Shrila Prabhupada's dying wish, a *parikrama* was organized by his disciple's and a deity of Shrila Prabhupada was taken on *parikrama* around Govardhana Hill. It was decided to organize this *parikrama* as an annual celebration and it has been performed each year since then. A few years later, it was decided to perform the full Vraja Mandala Parikrama in honor of Shrila Prabhupada, and this particular *parikrama* is now organized every year in the month of *Karttik*, which has now become very popular with all Iskcon devotees from around the world, who flock to Vrindavana take part in the ecstatic Vraja Mandala Parikrama.

The Purpose of Performing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama

The purpose of the Vraja Mandala Parikrama is to pay homage to the holy Dhama by circumambulating the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana just as Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had done five hundred years ago. The word '*parikrama'* is derived from the word '*pradakshina'* which means to circumambulate or walk in a 'circlular motion to the right' around a holy place of worship. The performance of *pradakshina* or *parikrama* is an important act of self-purification as well as an offering of devotion to the Lord. The goal of performing *parikrama* around Vraja is to increase ones *smaranam* or remembrance of Lord Shri Krishna, while seeing all the holy places where He performed His transcendental pastimes five thousand years ago. By performing *parikrama* around the sacred forests of Vrindavana, one's faith in the lotus feet of the Lord automatically increases with every step.

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was the first to perform the circumambulation of the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana and He chanted the holy names and danced in ecstasy in all the holy places He visited during His historic journey. Circumambulating the sacred forests had a very powerful effect on Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, especially after reaching the celebrated Imli Tala, the site where Radharani experienced the ecstasy of *maha-bhava.* After performing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, Lord Chaitanya's mood drastically changed and after returning to Jagannatha Puri, He became more and more absorbed in the transcendental ecstasy of Radha-*bhava*, while experiencing Radharani's own intense feelings when She is seperated from Her beloved Krishna.

While performing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, besides circumambulating hundreds and thousands of holy tirthas, temples and shrines, one also simultaneously performs many other important *parikramas* including the *parikramas* of; Vrindavana, Mathura, Radha-kunda, Govardhana Hill, Kamyavana, Varsana, Nandagrama, and Gokula Mahavana. Therefore it is said in the *Puranas* that those who perform the Vraja Mandala Parikrama are immediately freed from all their sins and will never take birth again in this material world. It is also said in the *Mathura Mahatmya*, **"What is the need for any further consideration, anyone who simply hears about the glories of Vraja Mandala automatically delivers two hundred generations of both his paternal and maternal family members."**

The Spiritual Benefits of Performing Vraja Mandala Parikrama

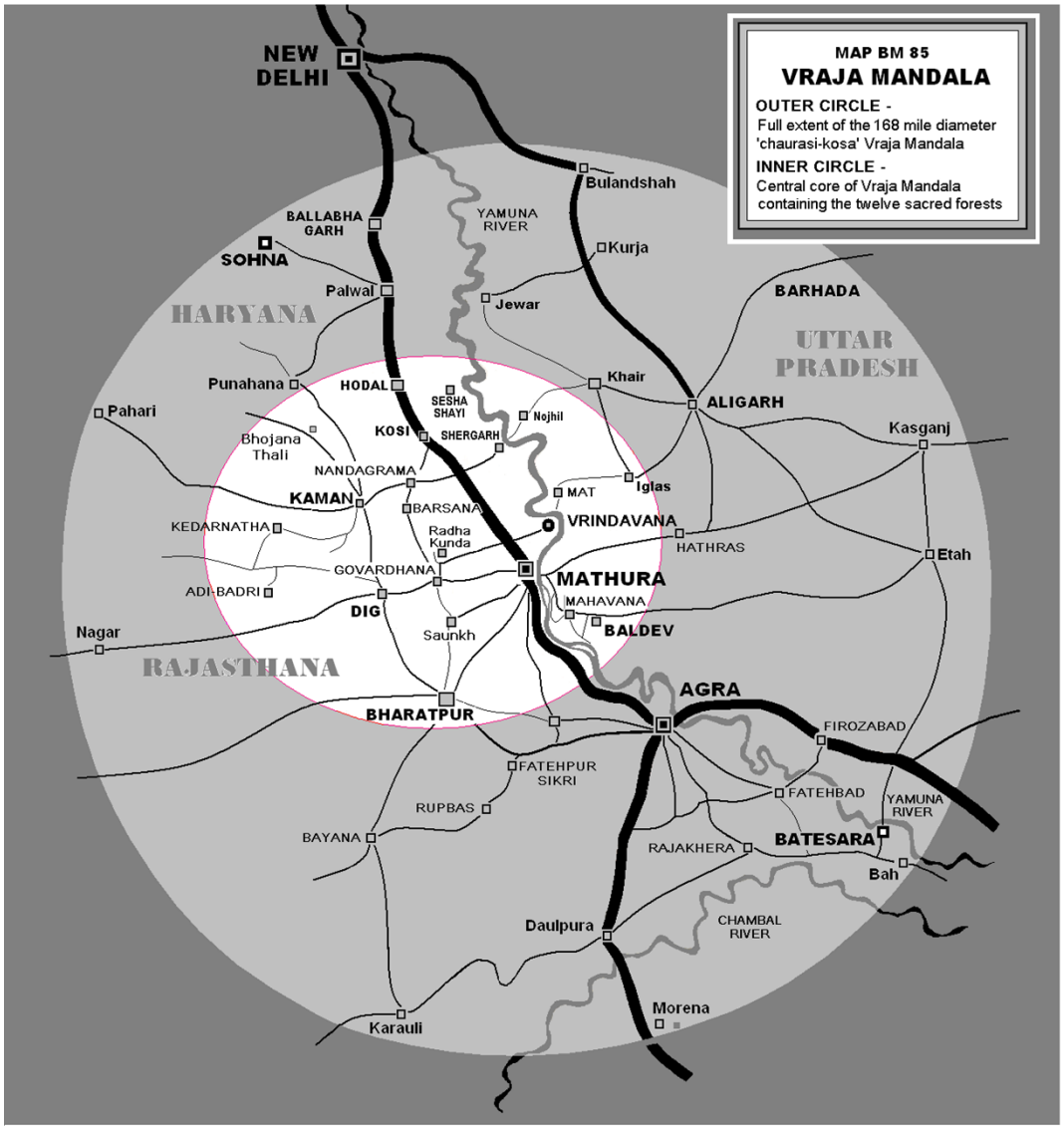
There are many benefits of performing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama and in the Vedic literatures one can find the following verses; In the *Mathura Mahatmya* it says, **"Those who with firm faith and devotion for Lord Krishna, who perform the *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala - are freed from all sins and go back to godhead at the time of death."** The *Adi-varaha Purana* says **"Those who visit the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana will no longer suffer the pangs of hellish life."** In the *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* it says, **"The result of travelling to all the pilgrimage places in the three worlds is achieved simply by touching the holy land of Vrindavana."**

The *Garga Samhita* says, **"Visiting Vrindavana is equal to visualizing the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Shri Hari."** The *Mathura Mahatmya* also says, **"All sins accumulated through innumerable births can be destroyed in a second by staying in Vrindavana even for one day."** The *Garga Samhita* also says, **"Walking in the holy land of**

Vrindavana is equal to the merit of going to a different holy *tirtha* with every step". The Adi-v*araha Purana* also says, **"By bathing at any place in Vraja Mandala a person is redeemed of all his sins."**

The Geographical Area of Vraja Mandala

It is said that the holy Dhama of Vrindavana is a completely spiritual place and transcendental to the material atmosphere, therefore attempting to measure it by mundane material means is considered to be an offense. Nevertheless, the Vedic scriptures have presented the approximate dimensions of the holy Dhama for the benefit of all the devotees who desire to take shelter of the Vrindavana Dhama and pay homage to Lord Shri Krishna.



The *Garga Samhita* says. **"The land between Baharisad (Barhada) in the northeast, Yadupura (Batesar) in the south, Sonitpura (Sohna) in the west, which measures eighty-four *kosas*, has been called Mathura Mandala or Vraja by all learned persons."** From Sonha to Batesara is eighty-four *kosas* which is equal to one hundred and sixty-eight miles. This is the actual diameter of the holy Dhama from north to south or east to west, thus creating a circular *mandala* with Mathura in the Centre. Therefore the radius of

Vraja Mandala from Mathura to its outer border in all directions is forty-two *kosas* or eighty-four miles.

Yadupura, the city of the Yadus, was ruled by Maharaja Surasena, the father of Vasudeva (Krishna's father), and is presently known as Batesara. The ancient name of this place was Saukri-Vateshwara, and was the place from where the boar incarnation of Vishnu, Lord Varahadeva appeared, and which is also considered to be His eternal residence on the southern petal of the lotus of Vraja. Sonitpura is presently called Sohna and is a well-known beauty-spot in Haryana State situated in the Aravali Hills famous for its hot-springs. According to some scholars this place was once called Yayavara and was the playground of Apsaras. Baharisad which is known as Barhada is located in Aligarh District of Uttar Pradesh State

The *Adi-varaha Purana* also confirms the area of the holy Dhama when it says**. "Mathura Mandala covers an area of twenty *yojanas* from Yayavara to Saukri-Vateshwara."** This distance of twenty y*ojanas* is equal to eighty-four *kosas* or one hundred and sixty-eight miles. The ancient measurement of a *kosa* is accepted to be approximately two miles and a *yojana* is accepted to be eight miles. Due to the diameter of Vraja being eighty-four *kosa* or *chaurasi-kosa*, the *parikrama* around the twelve sacred forests of Vraja is sometimes called the '*chaurasi-kosa'* Vraja Mandala Parikrama.

The inner-core area of Vraja Mandala around which the Vraja Mandala Parikrama actually travels is in fact only twenty-four *kosas*. In the *Adi-varaha Purana*, the following statement is found. **"Mathura Mandala extends throughout twenty-four *kosas* and is decorated with twelve forests, *dvadasa-vanas*, where Mathuradevi, the bestower of all accomplishments resides."** This verse refers to the inner-core of Mathura Mandala generally referred to as Vraja-Vrindavana, which contains the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana around which the Vraja Mandala Parikrama actually circumambulates. This inner-core area of Vraja is also confirmed in the *Skanda Purana* where it says. **"The tract of land called Mathura Mandala is spread over twelve *yojanas."*** Twelve *yojanas* is equal to twenty-four *kosas* or forty-eight miles and this inner-region is called Vraja-Vrindavana. This inner-region of Vraja Mandala is also referred to in the *Puranas* as being 'Nanda's Vraja' and is the place where the majority of Krishna's transcendental pastimes take place. From the descriptions found in the *Puranas,* Vraja Mandala is visualized as a thousand-petaled lotus flower with Mathura situated on the central whorl of that lotus.

Of the twelve sacred forests or *dwadasha-vanas* that are circumambulated by the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, seven are situated on the western bank of the River Yamuna including; **Madhuvana, Talavana, Kamudavana, Bahulavana, Kamyavana, Khadiravana,** and **Vrindavana**, and five are situated on the eastern bank of the Yamuna including**; Mahavana, Lohavana, Bilvavana, Bhandiravana** and **Bhadravana.** The Vraja Mandala Parikrama travels a distance of around two hundred and seventy kilometers from start to finish which on foot takes one month to complete.

The Best time to Perform Vraja Mandala Parikrama

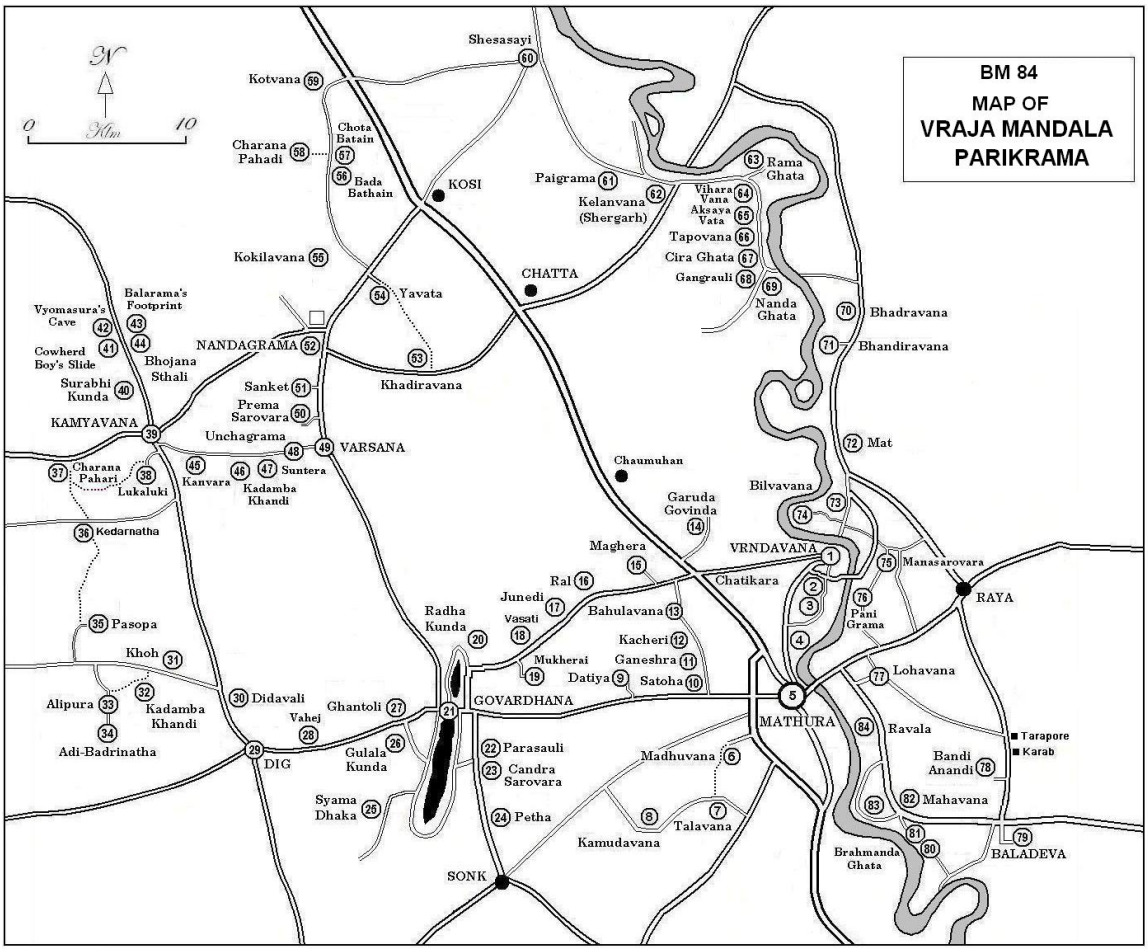
Although the Vraja Mandala Parikrama can be performed at any time according to convenience, there are also a number of specific dates recommended in the *Puranas* and specifically the *Braja-bhakti-vilasa.* Iskcon's Vraja Mandala Parikrama is conducted during the holy month of *Karttik* (Oct-Nov) and takes exactly one month to complete, starting on *Saradiya Purnima* and ending on *Karttika Purnima*. This is the same period when Lord Chaitanya performed His original Vraja Mandala Parikrama in 1515. This is also the best time as weather conditions are suitable for devotees from around the world, as *Karttik* is neither too hot nor too cold. During the holy month of *Karttik*, the results of devotional service is magnified over one thousand times thus making it the ideal time to perform *parikrama*. While performing Vraja Mandala Parikrama, there are a number of different routes followed by the various Vaishnava *sampradayas* which sometimes changes, but the overall purpose of the *parikrama* is to circumambulate the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana Dhama, whereas the places in between may differ according to preference. The Vraja Mandala Parikrama followed by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas as well as Iskcon is based

upon the *parikrama* route taken by Lord Chaitanya and mentioned in the *Chaitanya-charitamrita* and *Bhakti-ratnakara*.

The Vraja Mandala Parikrama that Starts from Vrindavana

All Gaudiya Vaishnavas who reside in Vrindavana traditionally start Vraja Mandala Parikrama from Vrindavana itself, in order to show proper respect to this most important amongst the twelve sacred forests of Vraja. Resident devotees of Vrindavana start their Vraja Mandala Parikrama by first performing the *parikrama* of Vrindavana while also taking *darshana* of the 'Seven Goswami Temples'. There is also a tradition amongst Vaishnavas that before starting the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, they should first take a vow *(sankalpa)*, promising Lord Krishna that they will complete the full Vraja Mandala Parikrama once they have started it. Although this *sankalpa* is generally taken at Vishrama Ghata, where devotees other than residents of Vrindavana start their Vraja Mandala Parikrama, the Vrindavana devotees generally take their *sankalpa* at the Madana-mohana Mandira, and then take a holy bath in the Yamuna River at Keshi Ghata,

After completing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama by visiting Mahavana and Ravala, the devotees from Vrindavana including Iskcon devotees, complete their Vraja Mandala Parikrama at Vishrama Ghata in Mathura, where they end their *parikrama* by bathing in the Yamuna River.



KEY TO VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA MAP

1. Vrindavana
2. Bhojana Sthali
3. Akrura Ghata
4. Ambika Kanana
5. Mathura
6 Madhuvana
7. Talavana
8. Kamudavana
9. Datiya
10. Satoha
11. Ganeshra
12. Kacheri
13. Bahulavana
14. Garuda Govinda
15. Maghera
16. Ral
17. Junedhi
18. Vasati
19. Mukherai
20. Radha-kunda
21. Govardhana Hill
22. Parasauli
23. Chandra-sarovara
24. Petha
25. Shyama Dhak
26. Gulala-kunda
27. Gantholi
28. Vahej
29. Dig
30. Didavali
31. Khoh
32. Kadamba Kanana
33. Alipura
34. Adi-Badrinatha
35. Pasopa
36. Kedaranatha
37. Charana Pahadi
38. Lulaluki
39. Kamyavana
40. Surabhi-kunda
41. Pichalni-shila
42. Vyomasura's Cave
43. Balarama's Footprint
44. Bhojana Thali
45. Kanvara
46. Kadamba Khandi
47. Suntera
48. Unchagrama
49. Varshana
50. Prema-sarovara
51. Sanket
52. Nandagrama
53. Khadiravana
54. Yavata
55. Kokilavana
56. Bada Bathain
57. Chota Bathain
58. Charana Pahadi
59. Kotvana
60. Seshashayi
61. Paigaon
62. Kelanvana
63. Rama Ghata
64. Viharavana
65. Akshaya Vata
66. Tapovana
67. Chira Ghata
68. Gangrauli
69. Nanda Ghata
70. Bhadravana
71. Bhandiravana
72. Mat
73. Krishna-kunda
74. Bilvavana
75. Manasarovara
76. Pani Grama
77. Lohavana
78. Bandi Anandi
79. Baldeva
80. Chintaharana Ghata
81. Brahmanda Ghata
82. Mahavana Gokula
83. Ramana Reti
84. Ravala

START OF VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA

BM.1 **VRINDAVANA**

Vrindavana is the most famous as well as the most important amongst the twelve sacred forests of Vraja and in the *Adi-varaha Purana* it says. **"O Prthivi, this forest of Vrindavana, is the destroyer of all vices and is protected by Vrindadevi. It is certainly My favorite place. Here I will perform pastimes with the *gopis* and *gopas* in all the famous and beautiful places which are beyond the attainment of the demigods."** The *Radha-Krishna-Gonaddesha-dipika* says. **"The best of all places of Krishna's pastimes is the great garden known as Vrindavana forest."** The *Adi-varaha Purana* also says**. "In all the three planetary systems, this earth is especially fortunate for here stands the town of Vrindavana."**

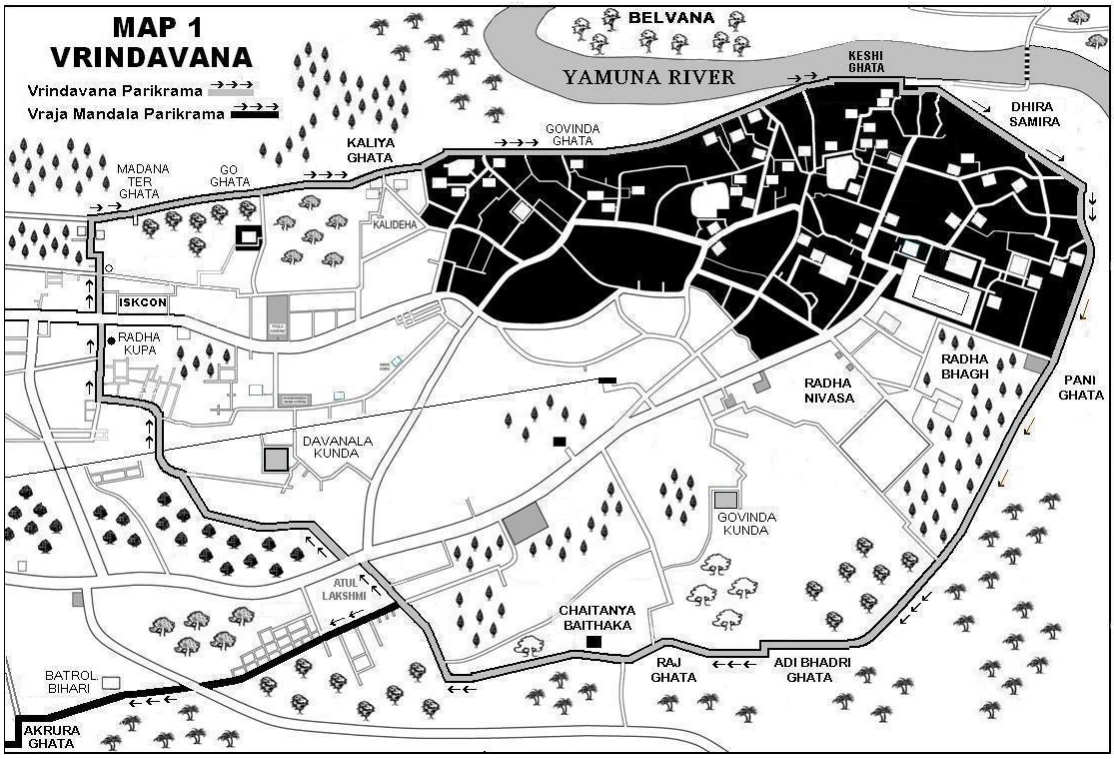
The forest of Vrindavana is considered to be situated on the northern petal of the lotus of Vraja, The forest has an individual *parikrama* of six miles (10 km), which takes about two or three hours to complete. This outer *parikrama* path is generally performed without stopping at any of the holy places along the way. However, when following the inner *parikrama* path, one can visit many important holy places including the famous 'Seven Goswami temples'. The tradition of performing *parikrama* around Vrindavana was first started by Lord Chaitanya and was continued by the various Gaudiya Goswamis and their followers. Today, the *parikrama* of Vrindavana is now the most popular of all the *parikrama's* in India and on *ekadashi* and other religious festival days, hundreds and thousands can be seen circumambulating the sacred forest. During the leap-month of *Purushottama-masa,* thousands perform the *dandavata-parikrama* of Vrindavana which can take as long as fifteen hours to complete.

Vrindavana is known as the forest in which Seva Kunja was located the where the celebrated pastime of *rasa-lila* took place during the warm moonlit nights. On those occasions, Krishna would dance in great ecstasy with the beautiful *gopis* of Vraja. Thousands of *gopis* would assemble in forest of Vrindavana after having been called by the sound of Krishna's transcendental flute. During the *rasa-lila,* Krishna would expand himself to dance with each individual *gopi*, and while embracing them He would exchange sweet tasting betel nuts by kissing them on their lotus-like mouths. After the *rasa*-dance had ended, Krishna would enjoy swimming together with the *gopis* and sport in the cooling waters of the Yamuna River. Vrindavana is also the place where Krishna performed intimate service or *seva* to Shrimati Radharani in a secluded bower at Seva Kunja, where Krishna would personally decorate Radha's lotus feet with red *yavaka (*vermillion), comb Her long black hair into braids decorated with forest flowers. He would also apply various cosmetics to Her lotus-like face and decorate Her soft and delicate limbs with golden ornaments and gem-studded jewelry. It was also in the sacred forest of Vrindavana where, after performing the *rasa*-dance, Radha and Krishna would lie down on a bed of flower petals prepared by the *gopis* and spend the rest of the night embraced in each other's arms.

The sacred forest of Vrindavana is also sacred for Krishna Himself, and in the *Gautamiya Tantra*, the Lord Himself says that He never ever leaves the forest of Vrindavana. **"This is my beautiful Vrindavana, My transcendental abode. It measures five *yojanas*. This forest is My own form. The Yamuna whose currents are like the flow of nectar, also bears the name Susumna. In this place the demigods and sages always remain here in subtle forms. I, who am the master of the demigods, never leave this forest. *Yuga* after *Yuga*, I am sometimes visible and sometimes invisible. My divine transcendental form cannot be seen by material eyes".** The five *yojanas* mentioned in this verse refers to the area from Seva Kunja to Nandagrama which is the full extent of Vrindavana forest. The *Puranas* also say that the transcendental forest of Vrindavana encompassed a vast area stretching from Seva Kunja to Nandagrama and included Govardhana, Radha-kunda, Varsana, and the entire region on the western bank of the Yamuna as far north as Kelanvana, that includes Rama Ghata, Akshaya Vata (bhandira Vata),

Chira Ghata, Nanda Ghata, Vatsavana and Vatsa-krida. This area is referred to in the *Purana's* as Nanda's Vraja. This same area corresponds exactly to the northern petal of the lotus of Vraja of which Govindaji is the predominating deity, and where Krishna performed the majority of His pastimes.

How To Get There: Vrindavana is 12km north of Mathura. (see map no.1)



Lord Chaitanya's Pilgrimage to Vrindavana

During His historic *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala in 1515, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu finally arrived at the sacred forest of Vrindavana after longing to reach there since His *parikrama* began. After establishing His camp at Akrura Ghata, the Lord would perform *parikrama* of Vrindavana every day, stopping for sometime at the various holy places to take bath, sit down, and chant the holy names. The *Chaitanya-charitamrta* mentions that Lord Chaitanya would go each morning to Kaliya Ghata, Dwadashaditya-tirtha, Keshi Ghata, Rasa-sthali, and Chira Ghata (Chehana Ghata), and would also bathe and rest for some time. But of all the holy places in Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya's favorite place was Imli Tala, where He would sit for long hours absorbed in meditation on Krishna's pastimes while chanting the holy names on His *japa* beads.

The forest of Vrindavana is the most important of all the places in the entire Vraja Mandala, as confirmed by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who spent over one month in Vrindavana, and specifically at Imli Tala, where He sat beneath Radha's favorite tree in deep contemplation on Her intense mood of separation from Krishna. Lord Chaitanya was not attracted to spend time anywhere else, accept at the place where Radha experienced Her most ecstatic emotions of divine love in separation. Even though Lord Chaitanya personally discovered Radha-kunda, for Him Vrindavana was even more important. This is because Radha-kunda is the place where Radha and Krishna meet eternally (*sambhanda)*, but Vrindavana is the place where Radha experiences Krishna's separation (*vipralambh*a). Thus making Vrindavana unique, in as much that there is both *sambhanda*, as exemplified by the *rasa-lila,* and also *vipralambha*, as exemplified by Krishna's abandoning Radharani and the

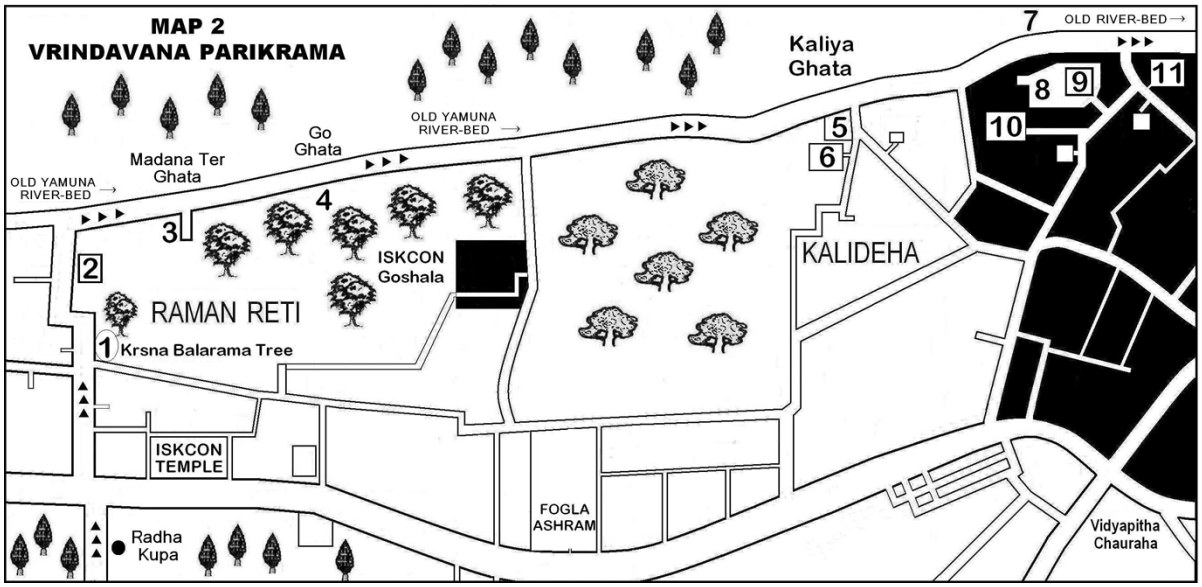
gopis so they could taste the nectar of His separation. In Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy as expounded by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, love in separation is the supreme pinnacle of all *rasa*.

The mood of separation is not so easily understood, neither is it so palatable for ordinary devotees; who prefer to relish the pastimes of Radha and Krishna when meeting one-another and enjoying *lila-vilasa*. Nevertheless, the ecstasy of separation is the most superior form of *rasa*, as was taught ans exemplified by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself. Lord Krishna's inner purpose for appearing on earth as a devotee in the form of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, was to personally experience Radha's unfathomable love for Him, as well as Her intense emotions of *vipralambha-bhava* while being separated from Him.

The Pancha-kosi Vrindavana Parikrama

The Vrindavana *parikrama* mentioned in this book is based upon the *parikrama* undertaken by Raghava Pandita, Narottama Dasa, and Shrinivasa Acharya, which is mentioned in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, and covers all the most important *lila-sthanas* of *pancha-kosi* Vrindavana. At the time of their *parikrama* around Vrindavana the Goswami temples had not been constructed, therefore the *parikrama* to the 'Seven Goswami Temples' has now been included within this *parikrama* of Vrindavana.

The *parikrama* around Vrindavana is known as the *pancha-kosi-parikrama*. The word *panch-kosi* means five *kosa* or about ten miles, and refers to the circumference around the twelve *upavanas* or small sub-forests that make up the inner-core of Vrindavana forest. The present *parikrama* path around Vrindavana covers a distance of about six miles as the *parikrama* path has been shortened in some places due to land acquisition. (The full extent of Vrindavana forest is mentioned in the *Puranas* to be five *yojanas* or twenty *kosa* in diameter). For the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, even more auspicious then *pancha-kosi-parikrama* is the *sat-goswami-parikrama* to the 'Seven Goswami Temples' and the *parikrama* mentioned here combines both. It may not be possible to have *darshana* of all the various temples while on *parikrama*, but simply by seeing the *shikara* or spire of a temple with either flag, *chakra*, or *kalash*, is equal to seeing the deity.



START OF VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA

V.1 **Ramana Reti / Krishna Balarama Tree**

The name 'Ramana Reti' literally means the 'pleasure sands' and during the time that Krishna and Balarama lived at Shakatikara (Chhatikara), the two transcendental brothers used to come here with their cowherd boyfriends and enjoy playing in the soft silky sands at this place. Unfortunately, the wonderful rolling sand dunes that could once be seen here have now disappeared. Radha and Krishna also used to enjoy pastimes in the adjoining forest grove of Viharavana. It is also said that they would sometimes meet at this place and then proceed together with the *gopis* to Seva Kunja. There were two trees entwined together here that were being worshiped by the local *Vrajavasis* as representing Krishna and Balarama, and known as the Krishna-Balarama tree. One of the trees has now disappeared. The *Vrajavasis* worship many such trees that are entwined together as representing Krishna-Balarama, Radha-Krishna, or Lakshmi-Narayana.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.2 **Varaha Ghata**

It is said that this is where Krishna showed His form as Lord Varaha, the boar incarnation of Vishnu to the *gopis*, and one can see a very rare deity of Lord Varaha in the temple here. There is also another place about two kilometers north of here on the old bank of the Yamuna known as Varaha Grama, (Barahara), where Krishna showed His form of Varaha to the cowherd boys. Lord Varaha is one of the presiding deities of Vraja Mandala and His eternal residence is at Saukari Vateshwara (Batasar) just south of Agravana on the southern petal of the lotus of Vraja. After killing Hiranyaksha and lifting the earth from the Garbha Ocean, Lord Varaha rested at Mathura's Vishrama Ghata where He spoke the *Adi-varaha Purana* to Bhumi Devi, mother earth.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.3 **Madana Ter Ghata**

In a beautiful garden located at this place, Krishna was once enjoying pastimes with the *gopis* when it is said that Karmadeva (Cupid), who is also known as Madana, arrived there with the intention of firing his arrow of attraction at Krishna. But upon seeing Krishna, he became so attracted by His transcendental beauty, that he became completely bewildered and fell unconscious on the ground.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.4 **Go Ghata / Ram Gol Ghata**

It is said that after Krishna had successfully subdued the poisonous serpent Kaliya Naga, feeling immense gratitude that Krishna was saved from the coils of the great serpent, Nanda Maharaja came to this place and gave away a large number of cows in charity to the *brahmanas*. There is now a *goshala* under the care of Iskcon situated near to this same *ghata*. Some say Nanda went to Gopala Ghata to distribute cows.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.5 **Kaliya Ghata**

This is where Krishna subdued the multi-hooded and venomous serpent (*naga*) known as Kaliya, by ecstatically dancing on the snakes many hoods. After Kaliya Naga heard that Garuda, the eagle carrier of Lord Vishnu, could no longer enter Vrindavana due to a curse pronounced on him by Saubhari Muni, Kaliya decided to move his residence to this place where a large lake had formed within the River Yamuna, because he felt he would be safe from any attack by Garuda, who is the mortal enemy of all snakes. Because of Kaliya's presence, this part of the river became highly poisonous and all the fish died, any animal that drank the water would die immediately, even birds that by chance flew over the lake would fall down dead after inhaling the toxic fumes. Understanding the great danger to everyone concerned, especially the cows who used to drink water from the river, Krishna decided that He must rid the Yamuna of this poisonous serpent forever.

Climbing a nearby *kadamba* tree, Krishna jumped into the water and began splashing about trying to attract the attention of Kaliya. Sure enough, the envious snake soon arrived on the spot to see who was causing all the commotion. The great snake immediately grabbed hold of Krishna in his powerful coils and attempted to crush His delicate body. The serpent exerted all his strength in attempting to crush Krishna, but to no avail. After Krishna saw all the *Vrajavasis* on the riverbank crying and falling unconscious on the ground due to anxiety that He might be killed, He decided it was time to exhibit His own strength. Krishna immediately freed Himself from the powerful coils of Kaliya Naga and then jumped on to the hoods of the serpent, and while playing on His flute, began to dance ecstatically from one hood to the next. As Krishna rhythmically stamped His feet down on Kaliya's hoods while dancing, it felt to Kaliya that he was being struck on the head by thunderbolts. Within a short time, Kaliya Naga was completely exhausted due to Krishna's incessant dancing on his hoods, which left him battered and bruised with blood oozing from his many mouths.

The wives of Kaliya Naga known as the *naga-patnis*, immediately came before Krishna begging Him to spare their poor husband, who appeared to be on the verge of death. After hearing the heartfelt prayers of the *naga-patnis*, Krishna decided to release the Kaliya serpent, but ordered him to leave the vicinity of the Yamuna River and depart with his wives and children to the ocean, where he could cause no harm to anyone. Kaliya Naga readily agreed to the proposal and after bowing his hoods in submission, quickly left the Yamuna along with his family forever.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.6 Prabhodananda Saraswati Bhajana Kutira and Samadhi

This is the place where the great Vaishnava saint Prabhodananda Saraswati Goswami performed his *bhajana* and where his *samadhi* is also located. Prabhodananda was the uncle and initiating guru of Gopala Bhatta Goswami and after meeting Lord Chaitanya at Shrirangam in South India; he surrendered to the Lord and came to Vrindavana and spent the rest of his life performing *bhajana* and writing books about Krishna's pastimes and the glories of the holy Dhama. He spent some time at Kamyavana but towards the end of his life came here to perform *bhajana*, He was an intimate associate of the Six Goswamis and amongst his works *Shri Vrindavana Mahimamrita, Shri Vrindavana Sataka,* and *Radha-rasa-sudha-nidhi*, are the most celebrated and well known.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.7 Prashkandana Ghata / Prashkandana-tirtha

On the hill above Prashkandana Ghata is the place where the twelve forms of the sun god appeared to provide warmth to Krishna; who was feeling very cold, having spent a long time in the Yamuna River subduing the Kaliya serpent. The combined heat of the twelve Adityas very quickly warmed Krishna's body to such a degree that He started to perspire. The combined water from Krishna's perspiring body then ran down the hill-side and formed a small lake within the Yamuna. The word *'prashkandana'* means 'perspiration' and thus this celebrated *ghata* achieved its name.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2)

V.8 Dwadashaditya-tirtha / Dwadashaditya Tila

After spending a long time in the water while subduing the serpent Kaliya Naga, Krishna was feeling very cold and came here to this hill (Dwadashaditya Tila), to lie down for sometime in the sunshine. Understanding that the Lord was feeling rather chilly and was also shivering due to being cold, all the twelve (*dwadasha*) forms of the sun god known as the Adityas, appeared there and provided their combined heat in order to warm Krishna's body. Thus this hill became known as Dwadashaditya Tila and the place on top of the hill where Krishna rested became known as the Dwadashaditya Yoga-pitha. Another name used to describe this same place is 'Dwadasha-surya-tirtha' which means the 'holy place of the twelve suns' and just below the hill is Surya Ghata where Radharani used to come and offer flowers to Surya the sun-god.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

V.9 **Madana-mohana Mandira**

The famous temple of Lord Madana-mohana is the first of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' that is visited during the *parikrama* of Vrindavana and was established by Shrila Sanatana Goswami. The temple was built on the spot where the celebrated deity of Madana-mohana was being worshiped by Shrila Sanatana Goswami on top of the small hill known as Dwadashaditya Tila. The temple of Madana-mohana was the first temple built in Vrindavana since the time of Vajranabha Maharaja five thousand years earlier. King Vajranabha, Lord Krishna's great grandson, established a number of important temples in Vrindavana including; Madana-mohana, Govindaji, and Gopinatha but during the course of time, these temples disappeared and the deities were also lost.

According to the some old records of the period, the first temple comprising of a single *shikara* or tower was erected in 1534 with the financial help of the wealthy merchant Ramadasa Kapoor. After a number of years, it is believed this particular temple developed cracks and therefore another temple was constructed during the same period when the Govindaji Mandira was being built. The present temple of Madana-mohana that can be seen today was completed in the year 1580, ten years before the Govindaji Mandira which was completed sometime later in 1590, having been built on a much larger scale.

In the year 1670, just prior to the attack on Vrindavana by the soldiers of the Mughal tyrant Emperor Aurangzeb, the deity of Lord Madana-mohana, along with the other important Gaudiya Goswami deities including Govindaji and Gopinathaji, were secretly taken out of Vrindavana for safety and hidden at Radha-kunda. They were then taken from Radha-kunda to Kamyavana, and then finally to Jaipura in Rajasthan, where the deity of Madana Mohana was worshiped for many years. Sometime later, when a princess of the Jaipura royal family married a prince from the kingdom of Karauli near Bharatpura, it is said the princess; unable to bear the separation of Lord Madana-mohana took the deity with her and established His worship in Karauli, where the deity remains even to this day. During the desecration of the temple by Aurangzeb's soldiers, some say that they dismantled the top of the temple *shikara*.

Madana-mohana is one of the three most important deities of Vrindavana, the others being Govinda and Gopinatha. The name 'Madana-mohana' means 'He who charms Cupid' the god of love (also called Madana or Kamadeva), and He is the first deity that all

Vaishnavas are advised to worship in order to reestablish their long-lost relationship with the Supreme Lord. In the beginning stages of *sadhana-bhakti*, it is Lord Madana-mohana who has the power to attract us and help to nullify our false attachment to the sensual pleasures of this material world. Just as He has attracted Cupid, He can also attract the fallen souls and raise them to the platform of experiencing the transcendental mellows of devotional service. The initiating spiritual master, who engages his disciples in following the regulative duties or *abhidheya* of devotional service, is the direct representative of Lord Madana-mohana. Unless one can achieve the mercy of Lord Madana-mohana and his representative the spiritual master, the path of pure unalloyed devotion is difficult to ascertain. For this reason the disciples of Lord Chaitanya, headed by the Goswamis Rupa and Sanatana, established the three principle deities in Vrindavana for the benefit of all aspiring Vaishnavas.

Before writing the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, Shrila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami came from Radha-kunda to Vrindavana and visited the temple of Lord Madana-mohana in order to obtain His permission, before attempting to write about the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. As Krishnadasa Kaviraja bowed down before the deity, a garland fell down from Lord Madana-mohana's neck and all the devotees present understood that the Lord's permission had been granted; the *pujari* then offered the garland to Krishnadas Kaviraja amid loud cries of the Lord's holy name.

How To Get There: (see map no.2)

The Story of Lord Madana-mohana

When Sanatana Goswami first came to Vrindavana, he performed his *bhajana* on top of a small hill known as Dwadashaditya Tila. Sometime later when he obtained the deity of Madana-mohana, he also worshiped the deity at this same place and is said to have kept the deity in a tree until a temple was eventually built. The first *seva-puja* of Madana-mohana was believed to have been performed in the year 1534 on the basis of ancient hand written records.

There are two separate accounts of how Sanatana Goswami actually obtained the deity of Madana-mohana. In the first version, the deity of Madana-gopala was given to Sanatana by a *brahmana* from Mathura named Purushottama Choube, who had been given the deity by Advaita Acharya (who had discovered the deity at Advaita Vata), and because he was leaving Vrindavana and returning to Bengal, he asked Choube to worship the deity. The surname Choube is short for Chaturvedi, and they are a well-known *brahmana* community from Mathura, who were also priests of the famous Keshava Mandira. In the second version based on an ancient hand-written record known as *Seva-prakasya*, it mentions that the deity of Madana-gopala was obtained from a *brahmana* from Mahavana named Parashurama Choube in the year 1534, and Sanatana Goswami established the first *seva puja* of the Madana-gopala in the same year, which was on the second day of the bright-moon or *dwitiya-shukla* in the month of *Magh* (Jan-Feb 1534), and Krishna Dasa Brahmachari was appointed as the *pujari*. It appears that at the instillation ceremony, Sanatana Goswami gave the deity the name of Madana-mohana. As the details found in the *Seva-prakasya* appear acurate, it must be concluded that Advaita Acharya gave the deity of Madana-gopala to Parashurama Choube (wrongly called Purushattama), a Mathura *brahmana* residing at Mahavana, who later gave the deity to Sanatana Goswami.

The generally accepted story of how Sanatana received the deity from Choube is that *w*hile staying in Vrindavana, Sanatana Goswami used to go to Mathura for performing *madhukari* and one day while accepting alms from the *brahmana* Choube's house; he noticed the children were playing with the beautiful deity of Madana-gopala. However the *Bhakti-ratnakara* specifically says that Sanatana was staying at Mahavana at the time when he first saw Madana-gopala. One day while chanting on his beads near the banks of the Yamuna at Ramanaka (Ramana Reti), not far from Mahavana Village, Sanatana noticed a very beautiful and unusual looking cowherd boy playing games with the other children. Sanatana felt certain within his heart that this was no ordinary boy, but must be Krishna Himself, enjoying pastimes with the local children. Therefore, when all the children returned home after playing, Sanatana followed the cowherd boy to see where he was living and determine his true identity. When the cowherd boy went inside a nearby temple, Sanatana also went inside, but to his surprise found himself alone inside a temple, with the little boy nowhere in sight, as if he had completely vanished. The only other person inside the temple was the deity of Madana-gopala. Sanatana immediately bowed down before the deity and without uttering a word to anyone, and in a deep mood of contemplation, returned to his cave near Nanda Bhavan in Mahavana Village.

After this incident, when Sanatana went out to collect alms he would also have *darshana* of Madana-gopala in the temple managed by the *brahmana* Choube and his wife, who also lived on the temple premises. On one occasion Sanatana felt somewhat shocked at the irreverence being shown to the deity, when he saw the Choube's children playing in their house with the deity, and also the way in which Choube's wife was serving the deity, as if the deity was one of her children. Sanatana mildly reprimanded the *brahmana's* wife, who was supposedly looking after the worship of the deity, and wanted to know why they were not following the specific rules governing deity worship, the *brahmana's* wife admitted her fault and agreed to be more conscientious in the future. However, that night Sanatana had a dream in which Madana-gopala told Sanatana that He had been very happy playing with Choube's children, but since Sanatana had asked the Choube's to be more reverential in their deity worship, they had now introduced so many rules and regulations, that He was no longer happy staying at Choube's house, and told Sanatana to take Him back to Vrindavana.

The next day, feeling great remorse that the deity was no longer feeling happy, Sanatana returned to the Choube's house to apologize for to his over-exuberance in encouraging them to be more reverential in their deity worship. However, Choube requested Sanatana to take the deity of Madana-gopala, as he had also received a dream in which the deity had told him that, as he already had so many children and Sanatana had none, therefore Choube should hand Him over to Sanatana. Hearing the words of Choube, Sanatana said that as he was in the renounced order of life and subsisted by begging alms, he was in no position to worship the deity in the proper way, and for this reason could not accept Choube's offer. That night, Sanatana received another dream in which Madana-gopala again appeared before him and once again asked Sanatana to take care of Him, saying this would make Him very happy. The deity further said that whatever simple things Sanatana could offer, He would gladly accept it. After this dream, Sanatana agreed to take the deity from Choube, and after bringing the deity to Vrindavana, began to worship Him on top of Dwadashaditya Tila.

Because of being in renounced order and subsisting simply on alms given to him while performing *madhukari*, Sanatana's only offering to the deity, besides water and wild flowers, were dry chapattis, small flat rounded pieces of unleavened wheat bread cooked over an open fire. One day, after having made an offering of dry chapattis, Sanatana heard the deity asking for some salt to put on His dry chapattis. Sanatana replied by saying. "Just see, now you want salt, and tomorrow You will want sweets; I am an old man and have so many books to write, so please be satisfied with these dry chapattis."

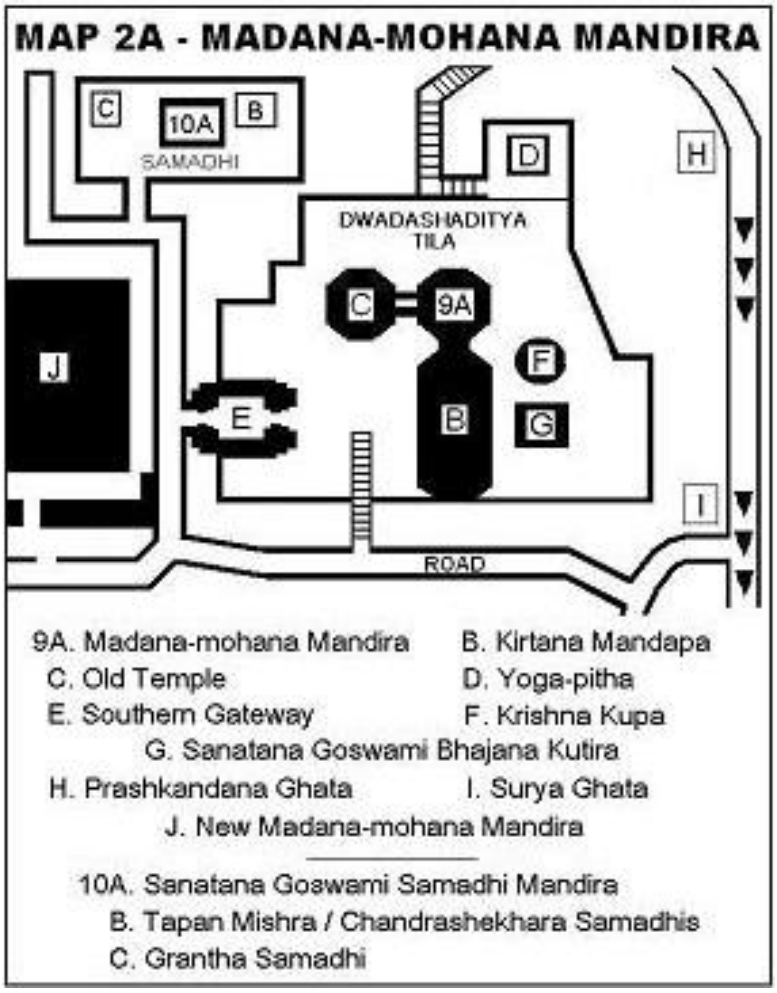
It so happened that on same day, a merchant hailing from Multan in Punjab, named Ramadasa Kapoor (some say his name was Ramadasa Sadagara from Amritsar), was ferrying salt and other goods by boat down the Yamuna River to the city of Agra, and while passing Dwadashaditya Tila his boat got stuck on a sandbank in the middle of the river. In great anxiety and fearing his goods may be lost, the merchant came ashore in order to get help. Ramadasa could not see anyone around accept a young cowherd boy sitting near the riverbank. Some say the cowherd boy was actually Madana-mohana taking part in one of His pastimes for which He was very famous. Ramadasa asked the cowherd boy if there was anyone who could help to free his boat and the cowherd boy informed him that there was a *sadhu* performing *bhajana* on the nearby hill who might be able to help. Climbing the hill, Ramadasa humbly approached Sanatana and asked him to help free the boat. Sanatana said that as he was old and also quite weak, he was not in any position to give much help, but advised Ramadasa to seek help from his beloved deity Madana-mohana, who was sitting in the nearby tree. With full faith, Ramadasa bowed down and offered heart-felt prayers to Madana-mohana and very humbly requested His help.

Suddenly there was the deafening sound of thunder and immediately torrential rainfall began to inundate the whole area. Within a short time, due to the heavy downpour, the large deluge of rainwater began to swell the Yamuna and the merchant's boat became freed from the sandbank. Being overcome with joy, Ramadasa repeatedly offered his obeisance's to Madana-mohana and profusely thanked Sanatana, asking him what service he could perform in gratitude. Sanatana suggested that Ramdasa could help in building a temple for Madana-mohana. It is said that after completing all his business in Agra, and having made a handsome profit, Ramadasa soon returned to Vrindavana, and provided the funds needed to build a temple for Lord Madana-mohana.

It appears that after Sanatana Goswami installed the deity on Dwadashaditya Tila, he named the deity as Madana-mohana, which is believed to have been the deities' original name given by Vajranabha Maharaja. Madana-mohana was one of two *gopala-murtis* carved by Vajranabha, the other being Sakshi-gopala. Previously Sakshi-gopala was known only as Gopala, but His name was later changed to Sakshi-gopala after the pastime of His becoming a witness. The Gopala deity discovered by Madhavendra Puri, who was one of the two *natha-murtis* carved by Vajranabha, was also known by other names like Gopala-Raya, Gopala-Natha, and also Shri-Natha.

V.9a **Bhajana Kutira of Sanatana Goswami**

This is the spot on the top of Dwadashaditya Tila where Sanatana Goswami performed his *bhajana*. The word '*bhajana'* means 'to chant or meditate' and '*kitira*' or '*kuti*' means a 'thatched hut' When Sanatana Goswami first came to Vrindavana, he lived beneath the trees without caring for any shelter. Even when he began worshiping the deity of



Madana-mohana, he kept the deity in the crevice of a tree. It was only at a much later date that he or any of the other Goswamis accepted *bhajana kutiras*. A typical *bhajana kutira* was made of simple thatched leaves and bamboo canes. When Lord Chaitanya first sent Sanatana Goswami to Vrindavana, he gave him a number of specific tasks to fulfill. In the *Chaitanya-charitamrita* it is said that Lord Chaitanya told Sanatana, **"Your body is My principle instrument for executing many necessary functions. By your body I shall carry out so many tasks. You shall have to ascertain the basic principles of being a devotee, love of Godhead, Vaishnava duties, and Vaishnava characteristics. You will have to explain Krishna's devotional service, establish centers for cultivating love of Krishna, excavate the lost places of pilgrimage, and teach people how to adopt the renounced order. Vrindavana is My very own abode and I want to do many things there to preach Krishna consciousness and I have to do this work through your body".** The essence of Lord Chaitanya's instructions formed the basis for one of Sanatana Goswami's most

celebrated books known as the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*. Sanatana Goswami was believed to have been born in the year 1488. He took birth in a *saraswata-brahmana* family hailing from Karnataka in South India, where his forefathers were known to have been powerful kings in the region. Some of their family members later moved to Bengal and this is where Sanatana and his two younger brothers, Rupa and Shri Vallabha (Anupama), were later born. Sanatana and his brothers were highly educated having studied under the great scholar Vidyavachaspati, the brother of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, and were also highly proficient in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali, and were acknowledged to be amongst the most learned scholars of the day. For this reason, the ruler of Bengal, the Nawab Hussain Shah, after hearing of their reputations as learned men, induced them to join his government and take up important administrative posts. As no one from the *brahmana* community was willing to be associated with Muslims for fear of being ostracized, at first the brothers refused, but when Hussain Shah threatened to persecute and kill innocent Hindus if the brothers did not join his government, they agreed not wanting innocent lives lost on their account. They then moved to Ramakeli, the then capital of the kingdom of Bengal that had been conquered by the Muslim invaders in 1486, coming under the control of Hussain Shah, a Satrap of the Delhi Sultinate. Nawab Hussain Shah appointed Sanatana as the Principle Secretary and gave him the title Sakara Malik, and Rupa was appointed as Finance Minister with the title of Dabir Khas. Their youngest brother Shri Vallabha, was given the title of Anupama Malik and was appointed as Superintendent of the Royal Mint. Consequently, the rigid and ultra-orthodox *brahmana* community immediately ostracized them. As they had long been acknowledged to be great Vaishnavas and also very learned scholars, they continued to have many sincere followers and would also spend long hours engaged in reading the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* and other Vedic scriptures.

After hearing from their associates about the wonderful activities of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and His *sankirtana* movement, both Rupa and Sanatana resolved in their hearts to surrender themselves to Lord Chaitanya and wrote letters to Him begging for His mercy and imploring Him to save them. Lord Chaitanya, after accepting the *sannyasa* order in 1510, had moved to Jagannatha Puri in Orissa. After staying at Puri for some months, Lord Chaitanya decided to go on a preaching tour of Bengal and after visiting Navadwipa, He proceeded to Ramakeli where thousands came to greet Him. Rupa and Sanatana accompanied by their younger brother Shri Vallabha eagerly went to meet the Lord and after placing straw between their teeth, very humbly approached Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu immediately falling on the ground like rods before His lotus feet. They then begged the Lord, that as they were the most abominable and fallen persons, having served the Muslim Government, they should be saved first. Lord Chaitanya immediately accepted them as His disciples and gave them their spiritual names. The three brothers immediately decided to retire from government service and join Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* movement.

Although Rupa and Shri Vallabha managed to leave the service of the government and proceeded to Vrindavana, Sanatana was not so lucky. When Hussain Shah came to know that Sanatana was planning to leave his post, he immediately locked him in jail. When Hussain Shah left on a military campaign to conquer Orissa, Sanatana took the opportunity to bribe the jailer who then released him. Sanatana immediately went to meet Lord Chaitanya at Benares (Varanasi), where he received the Lord's personal instructions. Lord Chaitanya ordered Sanatana to immediately proceed to Vrindavana to join Rupa and Shri Vallabha, who had gone to Vrindavana sometime earlier. After his arrival in Vrindavana, Sanatana Goswami set about fulfilling the mandate given to him by Lord Chaitanya. He left Vrindavana only once to meet Lord Chaitanya for the last time at Jagannatha Puri and then immediately returned. Sanatana Goswami spent the remaining forty two years of his life staying in Vrindavana and performing the important tasks personally given to him by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

V.9b **Krishna Kupa**

It is said that Lord Madana-mohana created this well by pushing His flute into the ground so that Sanatana could easily obtain drinking water. The word *'kupa'* means 'well'.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

V.10 **Sanatana Goswami Samadhi**

This is the Samadhi Mandira where in the year 1558, the sacred body of Shrila Sanatana Goswami was laid to rest. Sanatana Goswami left his body on the occasion of *Guru-purnima* at Manasi-ganga near Govardhana Hill where he was performing *bhajana*. His sacred body was then brought in a procession to Dwadashaditya Tila in Vrindavana and entombed next to where his beloved deity Madana-mohana was being worshiped. He wrote a large number of books on the science of devotion, the most famous being *Brihad-bhagavatamrta and Hari-bhakti-vilasa*. According to the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika*, he was Rati-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

V.10a **Tapan Mishra and Chandrasekhara Acharya Pushpa Samadhis**

When Lord Chaitanya was on His historic journey from Jagannatha Puri to Vrindavana, He spent around ten days at Benares (Varanasi) and stayed at the house of His old friend Tapan Misra, who was an acquaintance of Lord Chaitanya from East Bengal. Tapan Misra was the father of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, who while still a child, was able to get the Lord's personal association when the Lord came to Benares. After the Lord had taken His meal at the house of Tapan Mishra and was resting, Raghunatha used to massage His lotus feet. While at Banares, Lord Chaitanya also met Chandrasekhara, who was also a friend of Lord Chaitanya from Navadwipa. While on His return journey from Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya first went to Prayag where He met Shrila Rupa Goswami, and after instructing him on the science of Krishna Consciousness, sent him to Vrindavana. Lord Chaitanya then returned to Benares where He spent a few days staying at the house of Chandrasekhara while taking His meals at the house of Tapan Misra. During His stay at Chandrasekhara's house, Lord Chaitanya met Shrila Sanatana Goswami, who had just been released from prison. At this time Lord Chaitanya personally instructed Sanatana Goswami in the science of Krishna consciousness and asked him to spend the rest of his life in the service of Vrindavana Dhama.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

V.10b **Grantha Samadhi**

The word *'grantha'* means 'sacred books'. This unusual *samadhi* contains the sacred books of the Six Goswamis. It is believed that these books were of esoteric subjects concerning the very intimate pastimes of Krishna and the *gopis* and written on palm leaves. It is said that because the subject of these books was beyond the understanding of ordinary devotees, it was decided to place them in *samadhi*. This is believed to be the only *grantha samadhi* in existence anywhere in the world.

How To Get There: (see map no. 2 & 2A)

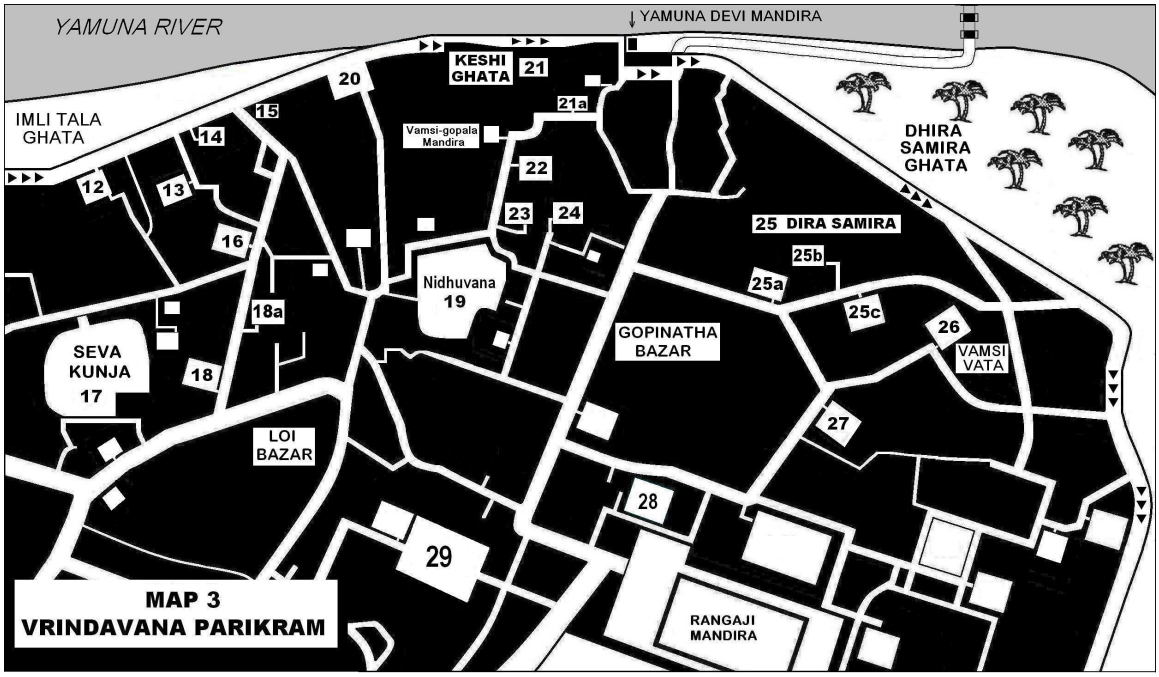
V.11 **Advaita Vata**

This is one of Vrindavana's famous banyana trees *(vata-vriksa*) and the place where Advaita Acharya performed his *bhajana* during the period of his stay in Vrindavana. While staying in Vrindavana, It is said Advaita Acharya had the great opportunity to meet Shrila Madhavendra Puri Goswami who was at the time on pilgrimage to Vraja, and took initiation from him here in Vrindavana in the year 1482. Beneath this same banyana tree, Advaita Acharya discovered the famous deity of Madana-mohana, also called Madana-gopala that had been originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja five thousand years earlier, but in the course of history had been lost. According to some, the deity discovered by Advaita Acharya was called Madana-gopala, and was a different deity to Madana-mohana, but this is not accepted by research scholars, who have concluded that Madana-gopala was another

name of Madana-mohana which was used by Advaita Acharya and many others. Krishna's great grandson Vajranabha had at least sixteen deities carved including, four *devas*, two *nathas*, and two *gopalas* (cowherd boys). The two *gopalas* were named Sakshi-gopala and Madana-mohana, also called Madana-gopala. This celebrated spot beneath the banyan tree at Advaita Vata is accepted by all scholars as the actual appearance place of Lord Madana-mohana. Unfortunately, due to insufficient historical records, there will always be opposing opinions regarding the detailed history, not only of this particular deity, but of many others as well.

When Advaita Acharya left Vrindavana for Navadwipa, it is said that the deity of Lord Madana-mohana informed Advaita Acharya in a dream that He was unwilling to leave Vrindavana, and therefore Advaita Acharya kept the deity with a Mathura *brahmana* named Choube. According to the *Seva Prakatya*, Choube lived at Mahavana where the deity was supposedly being worshiped. This deity of Madana-gopala was later handed over to Sanatana Goswami, because the deity desired to worshiped by Sanatana and be brought back to Vrindavana. Sanatana Goswami initially kept the deity in the crevasse of a tree and renamed the deity as Madana-mohana, after some period of time a temple was built on top of Dwadashaditya Tila. It is said that when Advaita Acharya returned to Bengal, he began worshiping a small deity of Krishna that he also named Madana-gopala, and this is one of the reasons why the confusion has arisen. Recently, this small deity of Madana-gopala was brought to Vrindavana from Bengal amid claims that it was the deity found at Advaita Vata, but this idea has been rejected by Gaudiya scholars. The fact is that all the deities carved by Vajranabha are quite large and distinct, and besides this, there are no historical records that Lord Madana-mohana (Madana-gopala) left Vrindavana before 1670, prior to Aurangzeb's attack on the holy city. Another important point is that the *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Lord Chaitanya as well as Lord Nityananda both had *darshana* of Madana-gopala at Mahavana some years after Advaita Acharya had returned to Bengal. Madana-mohana was accepted to be Vajranabha's original deity by the Six Goswamis and all other Gaudiya Vaishnavas authorities since the time of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

How To Get There: (see map no.2)



V.12 **Imli Tala / Tentuli-tala**

This famous tamarind tree known as Imli Tala was located on the bank of the River Yamuna and was formerly a part of Seva Kunja, unfortunately the Yamuna has now moved some distance away from this place but the bathing *ghata* that was once here is still known as Imli Tala Ghata. The word *'imli'* means 'tamarind' and *'tala'* means 'tree', the Sanskrit word *'tentuli-tala'* also means 'tamarind tree'. This famous tree died in the early nineties and now there is an offshoot of the original tree growing here. There is a small shrine beneath the tree where a deity of Lord Chaitanya can be seen sitting in meditation. Imli Tala is presently being looked after by the Gaudiya Math and there is a temple here containing the deities of Radha and Krishna.

The sacred Imli Tala was one of Lord Chaitanya's favorite places in Vrindavana and He came here every day to chant on His beads during His month-long stay in Vrindavana, at the end of His historic *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala in the year 1515. It is said that this particular tamarind tree was also one of Radharani's favorite places in Vrindavana, and whenever She was feeling separation from Her beloved Krishna, She would come to this spot by the banks of the Yamuna and experienced the ecstatic emotions of *vipralambha-bhava.*

On one occasion when Radharani was feeling acute separation from Krishna, She came and sat here at Imli Tala beneath Her favorite tamarind tree and began chanting Krishna's names over and over again. As She began remembering Her ecstatic pastimes with Krishna, tears began to flow incessantly from Her lotus eyes and She entered into a very deep mood of ecstatic separation known as *vipralambha-bhava*. She was so absorbed in thoughts of Krishna, that Her golden colored complexion began to slowly turn a bluish-black color known as *shyama*, the same color as Krishna's own bodily complexion. It is said that when Lord Chaitanya also sat here at this same spot and was chanting Krishna' names in the mood of separation, His golden bodily complexion also turned a same bluish-black color, just as Radharani's had done.

On another occasion, during the *rasa-lila*, due to being overcome with *mana* or lovers pique, Radharani suddenly disappeared from the *rasa*-dance and noticing Her absence, Krishna began franticly searching for Her everywhere, but was unable to find Her. Knowing that this tamarind tree was one of Her favorite spots, Krishna came here hoping that She would eventually come there. Sitting beneath the tree, Krishna began to experience acute separation from Radha and began chanting Her name over and over again. Due to the intensity of Krishna's transcendental emotions in separation from Radha, His complexion began to turn a brilliant golden color, the same as Radha's bodily complexion. Just at that moment, Radharani arrived there accompanied by some of Her *sakhis* and was amazed to see the golden color of Krishna's body. When Krishna became pacified after being reunited with His beloved Radha, She wanted to know the reason behind the wonderful golden form that Krishna had exhibited. Krishna explained that after suddenly losing Her association during the *rasa*-dance, He came here in a deep mood of separation and began chanting Her name over and over again, at that moment He began to experience Her same intense mood of separation, and His bodily complexion automatically started to turn a golden color just like Hers. After hearing this explanation Radharani was completely amazed. Krishna then informed Radha that during the Kali-*yuga*, He would again appear on earth in order to once again experience Her unique mood of separation while exhibiting Her same golden colored complexion, when He would appear as the 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

While in Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya stayed at Akrura Ghata and every day He would walk to Vrindavana and spend the morning performing solitary *bhajana* at Imli Tala. The *Chaitanya-charitamrta* says. **"The next morning Shri Chaitanya returned to Vrindavana and took His bath at Chira Ghata. He then went to Tentuli-tala, where he sat down to rest. The tamarind tree named Tentuli-tala was very old, having been there since the time of Lord Krishna's pastimes. Beneath the tree was a very shiny platform. Since the Yamuna flowed next to Tentuli-tala, a very cool breeze blew there. While sitting there, Lord Chaitanya happily observed the beauty of Vrindavana and the water of the River Yamuna. Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu used to sit beneath this old tamarind tree and**

chant the holy names of the Lord. At noon He would return to Akrura-tirtha to take His lunch."

The inner purpose of Lord Chaitanya's pilgrimage to Vrindavana was to see Imli Tala, the place of Radha's ecstatic emotions of *vipralambha-bhava*. During the time that Lord Chaitanya spent at Imli Tala, His own mood of separation from Krishna dramatically increased and by the time He returned to Puri, He was absorbed day and night in the uncontrollable emotions of Krishna's separation known as Radha-*maha-bhava*.

How To Get There: (see map no.3)

V.13 Shringara Vata / Shringara Ghata

The word *'shringara'* means to 'decorate' or to 'dress', either the deity or a worship-able person with various types of jewelry, ornaments, and clothing, and the word *'vata'* means a 'banyan tree'. Shringara Vata, like the Radha Damodara Mandira and Imli Tala, is also situated within the area of Seva Kunja. It is said that on one occasion when Krishna hid from the *gopis* and took only Radharani with Him, He came to this place. While sitting under this banyan tree, Krishna combed Radharani's hair into braids and then decorates her long black locks with aromatic forest flowers. Krishna would also decorate Her moonlike face with cosmetics made of natural pigments found in the nearby forests and smear black *anjana* on Her lotus eyes. He would also carefully decorate Her body with various gem-studded ornaments including a golden girdle, bangles, earrings, and a necklace of shining pearls. While Krishna was decorating Radharani in this way, She would hold up Her mirror and while seeing Her own reflection, gaze in awe at the beauty of Krishna's lotus-like face.

Shringara Vata is also the place where the cowherd boys used to enjoy decorating Krishna wiin various ornaments, jewelry, and costumes, and decorate His hair with fragrant forest flowers. Shringara Vata is also known as Nityananda Vata, because when Lord Nityananda came on pilgrimage to Vrindavana, He stayed at this very place. Lord Nityananda was an *avadhuta*, which means a *sadhu* or holy man who does not have any material conception of life, who appears to be almost mad due to intense feelings of love for God. While staying here, Lord Nityananda would often become completely absorbed in the mood of being a cowherd boy, sometimes He would sit down while chanting under this banyan tree and at other times He would roll on the ground in great ecstasy. On other occasions He would decorate Himself with flowers and cry out the names of Krishna in a very loud voice while shedding torrents of tears. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, while Lord Nityananda was absorbed in the mood of Lord Balarama and shedding tears in separation from His younger brother Krishna, He suddenly heard a celestial voice from the sky informing Him that His younger brother Krishna had now taken birth at Navadwipa. After hearing this celestial voice, Lord Nityananda immediately left for Navadwipa to meet Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.14 Jaru Mandala / Jamun Tree

This is the site of the famous *jamun* tree where Krishna once disappeared from Radharani, just to increase Her ecstatic love in the mood of separation. Once during pastimes in the forest of Vrindavan, Krishna suddenly disappeared from the *gopis* and took only Radharani with Him. After walking hand in hand for some distance through the forest, Radharani feigned weariness, hoping that Krishna would pick Her up and carry Her in His arms. Understanding Her mind, Krishna picked Her up and carried Her through the forest, eventually arriving at this *jamun* tree near the banks of the Yamuna. Radharani was feeling very proud and especially favored that Krishna had chosen Her above all the other *gopis*. At that moment Krishna suddenly put Radharani down and disappeared into the forest, leaving Her to lament Her mistake of becoming unnecessarily proud of Her fortunate position. Holding Her face in Her hands, She began weeping and condemned Herself for showing Her womanly pride in front of Her beloved Krishna, thus causing Him to leave Her. After some time, all the other *gopis* who had been franticly searching for Krishna in the forest, arrived at

the *jamun* tree, and seeing Radharani all alone and in such a forlorn condition, they became very sad and tried to console Her feelings of loss and separation.

The name Jaru Mandala means the area (*mandala)* swept with a broom (*jaru*). Some say that it was part of the area of Seva Kunja swept by Shyamananda Pandita, however, an ascetic (*siddha-baba)* performed *bhajana* here and many *babas* would gather to hear recitation of the *Bhagavatam*. The incident occurred probably in the late 17TH Century when Vrindavana became populated. The *babas* would always sweep the area with a *jaru* before sitting down. However, a blind old widow residing nearby earned her living by grinding flour with a hand-operated grinding mortar. As she was blind and also half-deaf, she was usually unaware of the time; consequently she would start grinding from the early hours and continue throughout the day and night. This always disturbed the *babas* who were trying to hear about the pastimes of Krishna, but not wishing to interfere with the old widows only means of livelihood, tolerated the grinding noise. Then one day, the old widow said a young boy suddenly arrived and put his foot on the grinding-mortar and stopped it, complaining that the grinding noise was disturbing the *babas* hearing Krishna-*katha*. The old widow told him her only income was from grinding flour. The boy then informed the old widow his name was Krishna, and that from now on his lotus foot-print would be indented on the grinding mortar and local people would come there to have *darshana* of His foot-print, and would also leave some small donation, and in this way she could support herself. This foot-print soon became famous amongst local *Vrajavasis* who came for *darshana* started leaving small donations.

This story can never be verified and the real importance of this place is the *jamun* tree connected to Radha and Krishna's pastimes. The *jamun* tree which is also called *jambul* is a variety of Indian damson whose small crimson colored fruit has a distinctive sweet and sour astringent taste and very much in demand during the summer as it is rich in vitamins. The foot-print at Jaru Mandala is not included amongst the famous Charana-Chinhas of Vraja Mandala because it was not manifested during Krishna's pastimes and also its antecedents are to some degree unclear.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.15 **Govinda Ghata**

At Govinda Ghata is situated on the banks of the Yamuna and was also part of the Seva Kunja, there is a very old Krishna Balarama Mandira and a *rasa-mandala* that commemorates the celebrated *maha-rasa* pastimes that took place here. This *ghata* became famous because Krishna suddenly reappeared at this place after He had disappeared from the *gopis* during the *rasa-lila*. He then enjoyed ecstatic *rasa-lila* pastimes with all the *gopis* here at this place, which is also referred to as *rasa-sthali* because the *rasa*-dance was also performed here.

The incident that led to the *rasa-lila* being performed at Govinda Ghata is as follows. One day, after all the *gopis* had congregated together near Vamsi Vata and were waiting to engage in *rasa-lila* pastimes, simply to increase their ecstatic love, Krishna suddenly disappeared and hid Himself in the forest. Realizing that Krishna had suddenly disappeared from their sight, the *gopis* became frantic and immediately started searching for Krishna everywhere. Becoming almost mad at losing Krishna and consumed by the intense mood of separation, they began talking to the trees, to the flowers, and also to the creepers, asking them if they had seen their beloved Krishna pass by. Feeling separation from the love of their lives, the *gopis* began remembering all the ecstatic pastimes they had spent with Krishna, how He had enjoyed Himself in their company, their dancing together, and how He had embraced them in His arms while kissing their beautiful faces.

The *gopis* who were searching here and there, suddenly noticed Krishna's footprints in the sand. They also saw the footprints of another *gopi* who must have been walking hand in hand with Krishna. All of a sudden, the footprints of that *gopi* also disappeared; they then realized that Krishna must have picked up that *gopi* in His arms and carried her deep into the forest. They began thinking how qualified and beautiful that *gopi* must be, that Krishna took her alone, leaving the all others aside. They began imagining how this particular *gopi*

must be enjoying all-alone Krishna's loving embraces and His nectar-like kisses. Eventually the *gopis* arrived at the celebrated *jamun* tree, where they suddenly found Radharani sitting all alone and weeping piteously, due to being bereft of Krishna's association.

The *gopis* immediately surrounded Radharani and tried their best to console Her and placate Her feelings of sorrow. Taking Radharani with them they made their way to Govinda Ghata, while singing songs in praise of their beloved Krishna. Then, just as they arrived at Govinda Ghata, Krishna suddenly reappeared before them. Forgetting everything, the *gopis* were simply overjoyed to get back their beloved Krishna and it felt to them that they had just got back their very life. Krishna then lovingly invited all the *gopis* to join Him in *rasa-lila* on the bank of the Yamuna at Govinda Ghata. That *rasa*-dance which occurred here during the full moon night of the *Sarat* season was called a *maha-rasa*, which occurs when all the various groups of *gopis* from all over Vraja converge together at one time to enjoy the *rasa*-dance with Krishna. On that occasion, it is said that there are literally hundreds and thousands of *gopis* dancing with Krishna at one time, thus it is referred to as *maha-rasa-lila,* the word *maha* means very great.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.16 **Radha Damodara Mandira**

This is one of the most important of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' and was established by Shrila Jiva Goswami, who was both the nephew and the disciple of Shrila Rupa Goswami. The original deity of Radha Damodara was personally hand carved by Rupa Goswami and given to Jiva as a gift. This deity is now being worshiped in Jaipura, where all the deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis were taken for safety due to the fear they would be desecrated by the tyrant Aurangzeb's soldiers. The replica deity known as the *pratibhu-murti*, which has exactly the same potency as the original, is presently being worshiped here at the Radha Damodara Mandira, although the *pujaris* like to claim otherwise. According to old records of the period, the deity of Radha Damodara was installed on the *simhasana* in 1542, when the first *seva-puja* was performed. In the same year Gopala Bhatta Goswami performed the first *seva-puja* of Radharamana. Then in the year 1558, Jiva Gosvami eventually acquired the land at Seva Kunja where the deity of Radha Damodara was being worshiped, during the same year he also acquired the land at Radha-kunda. There are no records pertaining to the construction of the temple, but as few temples were built during this period of the Mughal rule, the first temple would have been a very simple structure. The magnificent Goswami temples of Govindaji, Madana-mohana, and Gopinathaji, were built after Emperor Akbar's visit to Vrindavana in 1570, when he met Jiva Goswami and also gave permission for the temples of the Gaudiya Goswamis to be constructed. Emperor Akbar also donated funds for building of a small room for keeping all the Goswami's literatures. This room is to the left of the altar and is known as the *ghanta-garh* or book-room. The present temple of Radha Damodara dates from the *bhakti* renaissance period which flourished from the late 16TH Century, and this is also confirmed by the particular type of architecture and the materials used in the construction.

On the alter (*simhasan*) of the Radha Damodara Mandira, besides the deities of Radha Damodara and the *gopi* Lalita Devi, one can also see the *pratibhu-murtis* of two other Gaudiya Goswami deities including; Radha Vrindavana-candra (Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami) and Radha Madhava (Jayadeva Goswami). The deity of Radha Chalchikan (Bhurgarbha Goswami) is believed to be the original deity worshiped by him. One can also see the famous Govardhana-*shila* that was given to Sanatana Goswami by Lord Krishna for the purpose of Sanatana's circumambulation of Govardhana Hill during his old age. This *shila* is also believed to be the *pratibhu-murti*, with the original *shila* being in Jaipura.

The Radha Damodara Mandira, which was situated in a corner of the sacred Seva Kunja, was the place where Rupa Goswami established his *bhajana kutira*, and where he wrote many of his books. Rupa Goswami was assisted at that time by his nephew and disciple Jiva Goswami, who personally made the parchment leaves for Rupa to write upon and also edited all of Rupa's books. It was once said by His Divine Grace A.C, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, that the Radha Damodara Mandira is situated at the centre of the

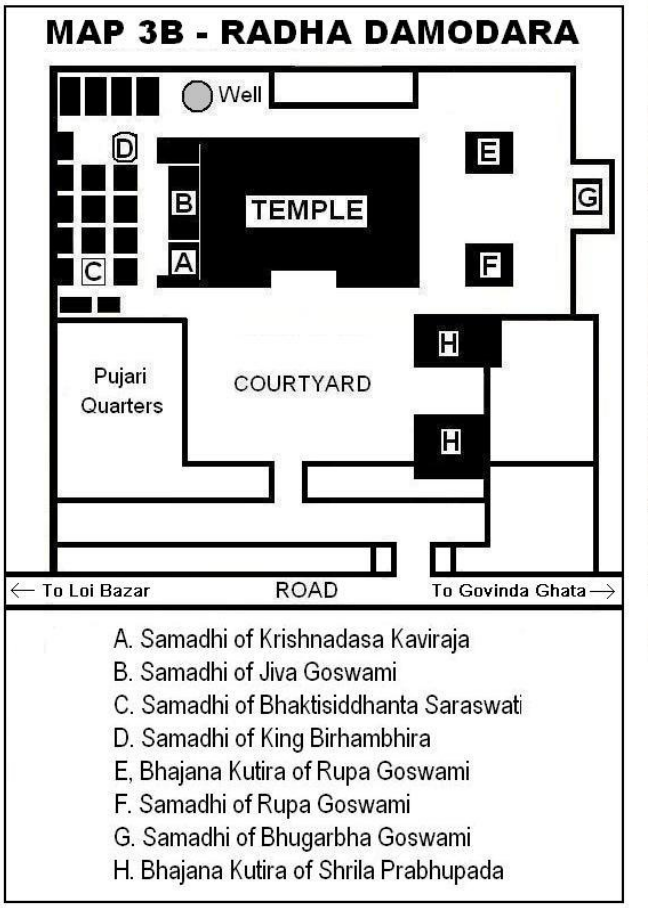
spiritual world, because of the divine activities performed there by the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana, who used this place for their daily meetings, and from where they made their plans to inundate the world with Krishna consciousness. Shrila Prabhupada also stayed here at the Radha Damodara Mandira for a number of years where he translated the first three cantos of the Vedic classic *Shrimad Bhagavatam* into the English language. After completing his translation of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Shrila Prabhupada left for America in 1965, in order to fulfill his spiritual master's order to spread the teachings of the Six Goswamis and the glories of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu throughout the world.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

Places of Interest at Radha Damodara

V.16a **Jiva Goswami Samadhi**

According to the records of his last will and testament, Srila Jiva Goswami entered *samadhi* in the year 1608, at the Radha Damodara Mandira in Vrindavana, where his sacred body was entombed. According to the *Gaura-ganaddesha-dipika*, he was Vilasa-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes. Jiva Goswami was the youngest of the Six Goswamis having been born in 1513, and was also the nephew of the brothers Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis, being the son of their younger brother Shri Vallabha, also known as Anupama, who died just after Jiva's birth. With his father already dead, the sudden demise of his mother prompted Jiva to renounce the world and in 1535, he arrived in Vrindavana to join his two uncles in propagating the message of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, whom he had met in his childhood. Having been personally advised by Lord Nityananda, Jiva had studied Vedanta philosophy



as well as Sanskrit grammar under the renowned scholar Madhusudana Vachaspati in Benares (Varanasi), and Jiva's reputation as a brilliant student and protégé had been growing by the day. On arrival in Vrindavana, he took shelter under Rupa Goswami, who accepted him as his disciple and trained him in all the finer points of Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy. With the help of both Rupa and Sanatana, Jiva soon became known as the greatest Vedic philosopher in Indian history. He is simultaneously credited to have been the foremost Sanskrit scholar that has ever lived. He was also the most prolific writer amongst the Gaudiya Goswamis of Vrindavana, having produced over twenty five important books including the celebrated *Sat Sandharba* and *Gopala-champu*; he also composed his own Sanskrit grammar known as *Harenama-vyakarana*. Even today, there is a department dedicated to the study of Jiva Goswami's works at the Benares Hindu University.

Shrila Jiva Goswami was such a brilliant scholar that it was difficult for him to restrain his youthful enthusiasm when confronted by those who wanted to present themselves as very learned scholars. On one occasion, he was actually banished from Vrindavana by his spiritual master Rupa Goswami, when he audaciously took to task the famous scholar Vallabha Bhatta, after hearing what he thought was the Bhatta's unwarranted critique of Rupa's perfect invocation to *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindh* (Nectar of Devotion). The most humble Rupa was so embarrassed by his nephews direct challenge and grammatical demolition of the senior Bhatta, he asked him to leave his association until he could develop what Rupa considered to be 'proper Vaishnava humility'.

On another occasion some years later, a famous all-conquering (*digvijayi*) scholar from Kashmir arrived in Vrindavana wanting to debate the highly renowned Gaudiya Goswamis. Having traveled the length and breadth of India defeating everyone, his ambition was to cover himself in glory as India's greatest living scholar by defeating Rupa and Sanatana, the famous Goswamis of Vrindavana. The *digvijayi pandita* began pestering both Rupa and Sanatana to engage in a debate, but the Goswamis had no time for such trivialities, as they were fully occupied with their own writings. Ultimately, just to get rid of the *digvijayi*, they agreed to sign a *patra* (affidavit) signifying their defeat at the hands of the *pandita*, if that would satisfy him and he would stop pestering them and go away. Having got the victory *patras* from both Rupa and Sanatana, the Kashmiri *panditas* attention then fell on Jiva, who everyone said was an even greater scholar than his two uncles. Puffed-up by his own false prestige and his cheap successes over the two Goswamis, he approached Jiva to challenge him in a debate. When Jiva saw the two *patras* signed by his uncles, he became filled with indignation after realizing the circumstances surrounding his uncles so-called defeat by this worthless Kashmiri *pandita*. Jiva Goswami immediately engaged in a furious debate with the *digvijayi* that is said to have lasted a full seven days, culminating in the utter defeat and humiliation of the so-called *digvijaya pandita*. Jiva immediately took back the *patras* signed by his uncles and destroyed them while the so-called *digvijayi pandita* beat a hasty retreat from Vrindavana, never to be seen again.

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, in His youth, had also confronted a famous *digvijaya pandita* from Kashmir named Keshava, and soundly defeated him by His superior knowledge of Sanskrit grammar. In those days, Mahaprabhu was a renowned scholar in His own right and was known locally as Nimai Pandita. The *brahmana pandita's* from Navadwipa were famous for their learning, especially in the various branches of Sanskrit grammar or *vyakarana*, like *Panini, Kalapa,* and *Kaumudi*. Nimai Pandita was a teacher of *kalapa-vyakarana*. The *brahmana pandita's* from Kashmir were undoubtedly superior to most other *pandita's* in India at that time, due to their vast knowledge of the Vedas, and they traveled widely defeating all those who came before them. The word *'digvijayi'* means 'one who is victorious in all directions'. According to the *Puranas*, Kashmir is a part of *bhauma-svarga*, or the 'heavenly realm' situated on the earthly plain, and is considered to be the original birthplace of all *brahmanas*.

Jiva Goswami's fame as the greatest scholar spread so far and wide that even the Mughal Emperor Akbar desired to meet him. In 1570, Raja Man Singh the king of Jaipura, himself a disciple of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, brought Akbar to meet Jiva at the Radha Damodara Mandira in Vrindavana, and the Emperor was so impressed with Jiva Gosvami,

that he provided funds to build a small library where the works of Jiva and the other Goswamis could be safely kept. Emperor Akbar, who was a pious and devoted follower of Sufism, also granted permission for Raja Man Singh to begin construction on a number of large temples including Madana-mohana, Govindaji, and Gopinathaji. Akbar also agreed to donate high quality red sandstone for the construction of the Goswami temples that was till then, reserved only for use on Mughal forts and palaces.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16b **Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami Samadhi**

It is believed that a portion of the ashes from the funeral pyre of Shrila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami are entombed here, while another portion of his ashes are entombed at Radha-kunda, where the actual cremation took place. At that time, some of the great Vaishnava saints were cremated so that Muslim zealots could not at sometime in the future desecrate their sacred remains. The other Goswamis that were cremated were Raghunatha Dasa Goswami and Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, whose *samadhis* are at Radha-kunda. Krishnadasa Kaviraja was renowned as a great scholar having studied all the branches of Vedic knowledge. He came to Vrindavana after Lord Nityananda appeared in a dream and told him to go to Vrindavana. He took initiation from Raghunatha Dasa Goswami and lived at Radha-kunda with his beloved guru and each day he would hear about the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya from Raghunatha Dasa. By the grace of his guru, he became celebrated as the author of *Chaitanya-charitamrta*, one of the greatest classics amongst Gaudiya Vaishnava literature which he completed in 1581, while he was living at Radha-kunda. The *Chaitanya-charitamrta* was based mostly on what he heard directly from Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, as well as from the personal diaries of Swarupa Damodara and Murari Gupta. In 1582, one year after completing the *Chaitanya-charitamrta*, Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami entered *samadhi*. According to the *Gaura-ganaddesha-dipika*, he was Kasturi-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

Some researchers believe that this *samadhi* at Radha Damodara is actually the *samadhi* of Krishna Dasa Brahmachari, the famous disciple of Gadadhara Pandita, who was appointed by Sanatana Goswami as the first *pujari* of Lord Madana-mohana. Some others venture to say that it may be a dual *samadhi* of both the saints. Others have said that it is the *samadhi* of another Krishna Dasa, who was the disciple of Jiva, and after Raghunatha Dasa and Jiva's disappearance, became the next *Mahant* of Radha-kunda. As far as most Gaudiya Vaishnavas are concerned, this tomb is accepted it to be the *samadhi* of Krishnadasa Kaviraja, whether it is a *vibhuti-samadhi* containing ashes, or a *smriti-samadhi* honoring his memory. During his stay at Radha Damodara, Shrila Prabhupada came here for *darshana* every day while circumambulating the Radha Damodara temple. Shrila Prabhupada respected this *samadhi* as that of Kaviraja Goswami, as well as that of Krishna Dasa Brahmachari, whom he said was the *ashta-sakhi* Indulekha in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes, and that either of the Vaishnava saints can be honored, as during their lifetime they both delivered love of Godhead to the fallen masses.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16c **Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupada Pushpa Samadhi**

Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami entered into *samadhi* in the year 1936, although some give the date of the following year, 1937, as he left his body during the night of December 31ST. It is believed he was the only disciple of the renowned Vaishnava saint Gaura Kishore Dasa Babaji, and later became the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder-*acharya* of Iskcon. The word *'pushpa samadhi'* means that flowers (*pushpa*) were taken from the factual *samadhi* of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati at Sridhama Mayapura during the original *samadhi* ceremony, and then placed in the *samadhi* here at the Radha Damodara Mandira. A *pushpa samadhi* is considered to be non-different from the original *samadhi*.

Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati was born into a Gaudiya Vaishnava family at Puri as the son of Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura in the year 1874. At the time of his birth, everyone

was surprised to see that his umbilical cord was wrapped around his body just like a *brahmanas* sacred thread. When his father took him to see Lord Jagannatha during the annual Rathayatra procession, a flower garland fell down from Lord Jagannatha's neck onto the child. All these things were seen as auspicious omens that this was no ordinary child. Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who at the time was the most prominent preacher of Mahaprabhu's message and the *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*, had prayed to Lord Krishna to send someone to help him in his mission of pushing forward Lord Chaitanya's teachings to the world at large. In response to the Thakur's sincere prayers, Krishna sent him a most brilliant son who later single-handedly revolutionized the method of preaching through mass book distribution. He also reorganized the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* in accordance with the ancient Vedic system of Varnashrama Dhama, by introducing the *brahmachary* and *sannyasa* ashrams, which became the main driving force behind his spreading the *sankirtana* movement of Lord Chaitanya to every part of the Indian sub-continent.

In his own lifetime, Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati established sixty-four temples of Radha-Krishna in all the major cities of India and also opened a number of branches in countries like Burma and Bangladesh. His long cherished dream, and also the desire of his father Thakura Bhaktivinoda, was to see the teachings of Lord Chaitanya translated into the English language and spread to the people of Western world. Their ardent desire was eventually fulfilled by Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta's most brilliant disciple, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who single-handedly translated all the important Vedic literatures into English, and spread the message of Lord Chaitanya and the chanting of Krishna's holy names, to every town and village across the face of the earth. For the first time in the history of the world, the Englishmen, the Americans, Russians, Chinese, and even Africans, were converting in thousands to Krishna consciousness and adopting all the principles of pure Vaishnava Dharma.

The great success of the world-wide Krishna consciousness movement under Shrila Prabhupada, was due to the solid foundation laid down by Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami, who became known as the 'Lion Guru' because of his fearless preaching of Lord Chaitanya's philosophy, combined with his stiff opposition to the 'cast*e-brahmanas'* and *'*caste-*goswamis*', who claimed that those not born in *brahmana* families, including foreigners, could never become Vaishnavas or *brahmanas*. Those arrogant bigots vehemently propagated the idea that only caste-*brahmanas* and caste-*goswamis* could study the Vedas and become preachers of Vaishnava Dharma. One group of caste-*goswamis*, known as the Nityananda-*vamsa*, even claimed that only they were authorized to become initiating gurus in the line from Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. These caste-conscious *sahajiyas* also strongly objected to Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta's awarding the sacred thread to those not born in *brahmana* families, even though it is approved under the Vedic *pancharatrika* regulations. However, with the rapid spread of the Hare Krishna Movement around the world and with millions of people having been converted to pure Vaishnava Dhama, and with highly qualified Vaishnavas-*brahmanas* now hailing from every caste, creed, color, and nationality, on the face of the earth, one can easily understand how blatantly foolish and totally misguided were these caste-*brahmanas* and caste-*goswamis*, who, in the face of the phenomenal success of the Krishna consciousness movement world-wide, have now been so rightly consigned to the dustbin of history.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16d **King Bhirambhir Pushpa Samadhi**

King Bhirambhira was formerly known as *'daku-raja'* or the 'dacoit-king' because to enhance his treasury, he employed gangs of dacoits and highway robbers to loot travelers and merchants who happened to pass through his kingdom. In the year 1582, Jiva Goswami sent his three celebrated *siksha* disciples namely; Shrinivasa Acharya, Narottama Dasa, and Shyamananda Pandita, by bullock cart from Vrindavana to Navadwipa, with a large box containing copies of the Six Goswamis books that were to be distributed amongst Lord Chaitanya's followers in Bengal and Orissa. During the long and arduous journey, as it was

late in the day and they were weary from traveling, they found a place to camp for the night, not realizing they were within the territory of the notorious King Bhirambhir.

Meanwhile, the king's astrologer informed him that a very great and unparalleled treasure was now passing through his kingdom. The king immediately dispatched a gang of dacoits to the spot, and seeing everyone was asleep, the royal robber's quietly made off with the box which they believed was full of treasure. Once they returned to the King's palace and opened the box, the King was surprised to find only books. Meanwhile, when Shrinivasa, Narottama, and Shyamananda, awoke early the next morning, they were horrified to find that the box of books had been stolen. Each book had been copied by hand, as was the practice in the days before the invention of the printing press, and to replace them was impossible. It was decided that Shrinivasa would remain behind and try to locate the stolen books, while the others carried on with their journey.

While moving here and there in search of the books, Shrinivasa gave lectures at various places about the glories of Lord Chaitanya and the Six Goswamis. The local people were enthralled by the discourses of Shrinivasa, who, having studied under Jiva Goswami, was both an erudite scholar and learned philosopher. Shrinivasa was invited to attend a discourse on *Shrimad Bhagavatama* at the palace of King Bhirambhira that was to be given by the *pandita* of the royal court. The lecture was disturbing to Shrinivasa, due to its unauthorized and impersonal conclusions and Shrinivasa challenged the court *pandita* on a number of points. In response, the court *pandita* also challenged Shrinivasa, sarcastically saying that if Shrinivasa thought he could give a better discourse, then he should go ahead and try. Srinivasa immediately took up the challenge and gave a resounding lecture based on everything he had learned from Jiva Goswami and from the books of the Six Goswamis. The audience was completely astounded and King Bhirambhir, who attended the discourse, was greatly moved by what he had heard.

King Bhirambhir was very eager to meet Shrinivasa and when the King asked Shrinivasa if there was anything that he could do to serve him, Shrinivasa mentioned about the box of stolen books. The King immediately broke down and tearfully admitted his dastardly and sinful activities of robbing travelers, while at the same time begging forgiveness from Shrinivasa, whom he recognized as a great saint. The King then led Shrinivasa to the box of books lying in the royal storeroom. When Shrinivasa saw the box containing the Goswami's literatures, he was overjoyed. After this incidence, King Bhirambhir took shelter of Shrinivasa Acharya and accepted him as his guru. He completely reformed himself and gradually became a sincere Vaishnava. He was later given initiation by Shrinivasa and received the name Chaitanya Dasa. He renamed his kingdom as Vana Vishnupura and encouraged all the citizens to adopt Vaishnava Dharma; very soon his kingdom became famous as a thoroughly Vaishnava state.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16e **Rupa Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

On his arrival in Vrindavana, Shrila Rupa Goswami chose this spot in the sacred garden of Seva Kunja near the banks of the Yamuna to perform his *bhajana* and rest beneath the trees at night. This spot in Seva Kunja eventually became his 'de facto' headquarters, where he would hold meetings with the other Goswamis and where he held discourses on *Shrimad Bhagavatama* and other Vaishnava literatures. It was also here where he wrote many of his important books including the great Vaishnava classic *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu,* the Nectar of Devotion, which he completed in 1541. Within time, a simple thatched cottage was built for Rupa Goswami where he could keep his parchment leaves and other items used for writing books.

After personally instructing Shrila Rupa Goswami at Prayag (Allahabad) on the philosophy and practices of pure devotional service to Krishna, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu directly ordered him to go to Vrindavana as His personal representative, for the purpose of excavating the lost holy places of Lord Krishna's pastimes, to write books on the science of devotion, and to construct temples dedicated to Radha and Krishna, as well as establish the rules and regulations pertaining to deity worship. Lord Chaitanya's vision was that

Vrindavana would be the centre from where His *sankirtana* movement would spread out across the face of the earth.

Shrila Rupa Goswami arrived in Vrindavana from Prayag, along with his youngest brother Shri Vallabha (Anupama), in the year 1516. At the time his elder brother Sanatana, had been imprisoned by Hussain Shah, the Nawab of Bengal, and could only join Rupa sometime later after gaining his release from jail. The three brothers Rupa, Sanatana, and Shri Vallabha, belonged to the aristocratic *saraswata-brahmana* community, and had been forcibly coerced under threat of dire consequences to accept important ministerial posts in the government of Hussain Shah. This happened because the brothers were the most highly educated and erudite scholars of the day, and were proficient in a number of languages including Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. By the divine grace bestowed upon them by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the three brothers eventually gained release from the clutches of the Nawab and were able to surrender their lives to the Lord's *sankirtana* mission.

Although Rupa's youngest brother Shri Vallabha died untimely, his son Jiva eventually joined Rupa in Vrindavana in the year 1535, and became an important assistant who knew the art of making parchment leaves for writing books, and because of his high level of education, especially in Sanskrit grammar, Jiva was able to edit all the books written by Rupa Goswami. Eventually, Jiva, who was already a brilliant scholar of Sanskrit and Vedic philosophy, even in his youth, became the initiated disciple of Rupa Goswami and under his expert guidance; Jiva he went on to become the greatest scholar of Sanskrit literature that has ever lived.

Lord Chaitanya had specifically asked Rupa to find the important deities of Vrindavana that were formally established five thousand years earlier by Vajranabha Maharaja, the great grandson of Lord Krishna, that during the course of time had been lost, including the famous deity of Govindaji, the presiding deity of Vrindavana. During the course of his excavation work in Vrindavana, Rupa Goswami, with the help of a 'cowherd boy', discovered the deity of Lord Govindaji buried in the ground near the site known as the Yoga-pitha, where some years later the monumental temple of Govindaji was eventually constructed. Rupa also discovered the deity of Vrinda Devi at Brahma-kunda, after she appeared in a dream and told him exactly where she was hidden.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16f **Rupa Goswami Samadhi**

Srila Rupa Goswami entered *samadhi* in the year 1564, and his sacred body was entombed here next to his *bhajana kutira*, by his beloved disciple and nephew Jiva. Rupa Goswami was born in the year 1489 and first met Lord Chaitanya along with his two brothers at Ramakeli, West Bengal, in 1514, at this first meeting, the three brothers resolved in their hearts to renounce the world and devote their lives to the service of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In the year 1516, Rupa Goswami arrived in Vrindavana and spent the rest of his life in propagating the mission of Lord Chaitanya, and by the time he left the world, he had done enough to firmly establish Vrindavana, the place where Lord Krishna performed His transcendental pastimes, as the most important place of pilgrimage, not only in India, but on the entire face of the earth.

Even though Rupa Goswami accepted his elder brother Sanatana as his guru, Rupa is recognized as the most prominent amongst the Six Goswamis and was undoubtedly the main driving force in pushing forward Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* mission. Even though all Gaudiya Vaishnavas accepted Sanatana Goswami as their guru, being the senior-most disciple of Lord Chaitanya, they simultaneously acknowledged Rupa Goswami as the spiritual leader of all Gaudiya Vaishnavas in the world. In the year 1534, with the sudden disappearance of Lord Chaitanya, it was Shrila Rupa Goswami who kept Lord Chaitanya's fledgling mission united and steered it to even greater heights, becoming the first great a*charya* of the newly formed Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* founded exclusively on the precepts and teachings of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition,

all the followers of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu are known as Rupanugas, or those who follow in the footsteps of Shrila Rupa Goswami.

According to the *Gaura-ganaddesha-dipika*, Rupa Goswami was the highly celebrated Rupa-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes. Rupa-manjari is one of Radha's most confidential maidservants and in the transcendental hierarchy of *gopi* maidservants; she is considered second only to Lalita-sakhi. It is therefore said in the Vaishnava *tantras*, that before one can approach Radha and Krishna, one must first approach Lalita-sakhi and take her blessings, then only can one dare to approach Radha and Krishna. Concomitantly, it is also said that before one should approach Lalita, one should first approach her assistant, the all-merciful Rupa-manjari, and take her blessings, then only one can approach Lalita-sakhi.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16g **Bhugarbha Goswami Samadhi**

Bhugarbha Goswami is one of the least known amongst the Vrindavana Goswamis because he lived a very reclusive life. He became known as Bhugarbha because he would generally find a hole (*garbha*) in the ground (*bhu*) in which he would perform his *bhajana*. He was a disciple of Gadadhara Pandita and a very close friend of Lokanatha Goswami. Once in a dream, Lord Chaitanya appeared before him and ordered him to go to Vrindavana and locate all the sacred forests. His friend Lokanatha also had a similar dream, in which Lord Chaitanya gave him a same order, go to Vrindavana and locate the sacred forests and places of Krishna's pastimes. The two friends immediately left for Vrindavana where they arrived in the year 1509. They traveled to many of the places in Vraja and located many of the important forests and other *tirthas*. Lokanatha also discovered the celebrated deity of Radha Vinoda at Kishori-kunda near Umraya.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.16h **Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada Bhajana Kutira**

These are the famous rooms at the Radha Damodara Mandira where His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder-*acharya* of Iskcon, stayed for six years before leaving on his historic journey to the U.S.A., in the year 1965, where he founded the International Society for Krishna, popularly known as the Hare Krishna Movement. Having been born into an aristocratic Vaishnava family in Calcutta in 1896, Shrila Prabhupada, as he was known amongst his followers, first met his spiritual master Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami in 1922, and later in 1933 he became his formally initiated disciple. After running a successful pharmaceutical business in Allahabad, Shrila Prabhupada retired in 1954 and after adopting the *vanaprasta-ashrama*, he started the iconic monthly magazine 'Back To Godhead' and eventually moved to Jhansi in Madhya Pradesh where he opened a preaching centre for propagating the teachings of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

In 1956, Shrila Prabhupada moved to the holy city of Vrindavana where he initially stayed in a room at the Vamsi Gopala Mandira near Keshi Ghata. Then in July 1959, after having begun his now famous translation into English of the Vedic classic *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, Shrila Prabhupada moved to the famous Radha Damodara Mandira and occupied two rooms on the upper floor. Then in 1962, Shrila Prabhupada moved downstairs into two rooms on the ground floor, adjacent to the temple courtyard. One of the rooms, which also overlooked the s*amadhi* of Shrila Rupa Goswami, became his kitchen and the place where he honored *prashadam* while looking out through the latticed window at Rupa's Goswami's *samadhi* and *bhajana kutira*. The other room he used as his *bhajana kutira* where he chanted *japa* and spent most of his time translating the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*.

Moving to the Radha Damodara Mandira was a major turning point in Shrila Prabhupada's life, and it was here where he began in earnest his life's mission of fulfilling his spiritual master's order, to spread the teachings Lord Chaitanya and the *sankirtana* movement to the Western world. On September 17TH 1959, Shrila Prabhupada accepted the renounced order of life known as *tridandi-sannyasa*, from his dear god-brother Keshava Maharaja at the Gaudiya Matha in Mathura. After moving to Radha Damodara and now

having taken *sannyasa*, Shrila Prabhupada began formulating his plans of traveling to America and establishing a world-wide society of devotees dedicated to the devotional service of Radha and Krishna. In 1960, Shrila Prabhupada produced a small book entitled, 'Easy Journey to Other Planets' while he continued with his 'magnum opus' translation of the first-canto of *Shrimad Bhagavatam,* that would later form the basis of his preaching work in the Western world.

Shrila Prabhupada said that the Radha Damodara Mandira was the most important temple in Vrindavana, because it was here that Shrila Rupa Goswami resided, and where he established his headquarters for preaching the mission of Lord Chaitanya's. Lord Chaitanya had personally sent Rupa Goswami to Vrindavana to perform this important task of establishing the *sankirtana* movement for the benefit of the whole world. Shrila Prabhupada has said that this corner at the Radha Damodara Mandira was like the hub of the spiritual world, due to the activities performed there by the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana in propagating the Krishna consciousness movement, which began here under Rupa Goswami leadership, and then gradually spread out around the world, just as the spokes of a wheel start from the hub, and then spread out in every direction. Shrila Rupa Goswami established the solid foundation of Lord Chaitanya's mission here at Radha Damodara, but it was Shrila Prabhupada who single-handedly took that mission from there, to every part of the globe. With a crate of his English translations of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* and just forty rupees in his pocket, Shrila Prabhupada left the Radha Damodara Mandira in Vrindavana and on the 13TH of August 1965, set sail from the Indian port of Calcutta, having obtained a free passage on the Scindia Lines merchant ship Jaladutta, bound for the United States of America where he arrived on the 17TH September, the rest is now a part of history.

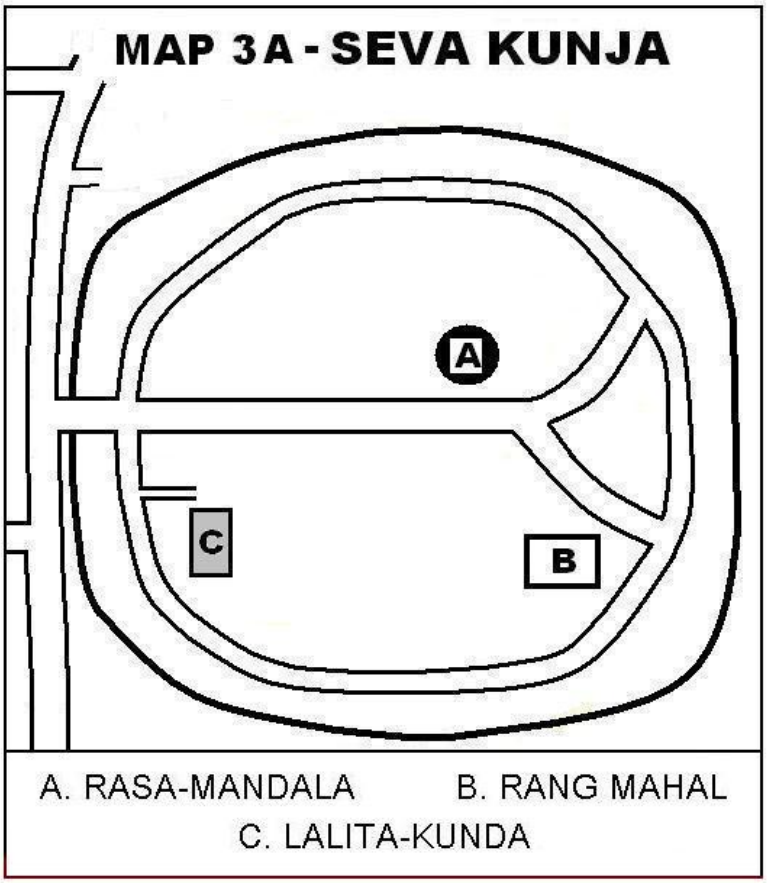
Living at Vrindavana's Radha Damodara Mandira as a *sannyasi* and performing *madhukari* in order to sustain his existence, was said by Shrila Prabhupada to have been one of the most blissful periods of his life. While staying there, besides writing books, he would go on *parikrama* every morning and evening to have *darshana* of all the famous deities and temples of Vrindavana. While residing in his rooms at Radha Damodara, Shrila Prabhupada once revealed that both Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami had appeared to him in dreams, encouraging him to accomplish the greatest task ever expected of a pure devotee - to deliver the mercy of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to an inhospitable and hostile alien world. Shrila Prabhupada's stay at Radha Damodara, not only transformed his own life, but ultimately transformed the lives of millions of people around the world, besides changing the religious history of the whole human race. Shrila Prabhupada once confidentially informed his senior disciples, that he is eternally present in his rooms at the Radha Damodara Mandira. Shrila Prabhupada entered *samadhi* in November 1977, at the Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana, where his Samadhi Mandira is now situated.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3B)

V.17 **Seva Kunja (Rasa-sthali)**

In this particular forest grove also called Nikunjavana, Krishna massaged Radharani's lotus feet and decorated them with red *yavaka* (vermillion). Krishna also massaged Her delicate limbs with perfumed oil, comb Her long black hair into braids, and applied cosmetics to Her moon-like face, and dressed Her with silken garments and gem-encrusted ornaments. After the rasa-dance was over the *gopis* would prepare a soft bed made of flower petals and invite Radha and Krishna to lie down together so They might spend the night entwined within each other's arms. At Seva Kunja, one can see the actual place known as the Rang Mahal Mandira, where Krishna served the lotus feet of Radharani. One can also see Lalita-kunda that was created by Krishna just to please Lalita-sakhi, and also the *rasa-mandala* platform commemorating the *rasa-lila* pastimes that took place here.

Seva Kunja is also referred to as Rasa-sthali, because it was the site of Krishna's most ecstatic *rasa-lila* pastimes with the beautiful *gopis* of Vraja. The *rasa-lila* or *rasa*-dance is considered to be the high-point of the nocturnal pastimes between Krishna and the *gopis*, during which every *gopi* has the opportunity to dance directly with Krishna. When the *rasa*-dance begins, Krishna stands alone in the middle as the *gopis* dance around Him in a circular



motion, while singing songs in chorus and clapping their hands to the ecstatic beat of the drums. The most enchanting sound was created by the jingling of the *gopis* ankle-bells, as they dance in perfect unison around the *rasa-mandala*. Each *gopi* was thinking that Krishna was looking directly at her while she performed her dance of love before Him. Then by His mystical *prakash* potency, Krishna expand Himself into hundreds of identical forms to dance next to each individual *gopi*, who could then personally enjoy His loving embraces and taste His nectar-like kisses.

The place which is presently called Seva Kunja was formerly called Nikunjavana, and was one of twelve small forest groves of Vrindavana also called *upavanas*. Sometimes when the *Puranas* refer to Seva Kunja, it refers to all twelve of the sub-forests that form the inner-most core of the vast and expansive forest of Vrindavana. According to the *Puranas*, the whole area bordered by the River Yamuna, from Mohana Ter Ghata to Adi-Badri Ghata was referred to as being Seva kunja. Therefore, such places as Kaliya-Ghata, Madana-mohana, Imli Tala, Radha Damodara, Shringara Vata, Govinda Ghata, Chehana Ghata, Keshi Ghata, Nidhuvana, Jhulanavana, Gopinatha, Dira Samira, Vamsi Vata, Gopishwara, Brahma-kunda, Govinda-kunda and Govindaji Yoga-pitha, are also considered to be different *lila-sthanas* within Seva Kunja. The *Puranas* also refer to these twelve small *upavanas* or sub-forests that surround the Govindaji Yoga-pith like petals of a lotus, as the 'Garden of Vrindavana'.

The twelve *upavanas* of Vrindavan and their approximate locations are as follows;

Viharavana - surounding Krishna Balarama Mandira and Radha Kupa
Gocharanavana - surrounding Varaha Ghata and Go Ghata
Kaliyadamanavana - surrounding Kaliya Ghata
Gopalavana – surounding Gopala Ghata (Karauli Ghata)
Nikunjavana - surrounding Seva Kunja

Nidhuvana - next to the Radharamana Mandira
Radhavana - between 64 Samadhi Pitha and Pani Ghata
Jhulanavana - between Ragaji Bhaga Garden and Panighata Village
Gaharavana - surrounding Pani Ghata
Papadavana - surrounding Adi-Badri Ghata
Atalavana - where the Vrindavana *parikrama* path crosses the Mathura Road
Kevarivana - surrounding Davanala-kunda

The *Puranas* say that the forest of Vrindavana encompassed a vast area stretching from Seva Kunja to Nandagrama and included Govardhana, Radha-kunda, Varsana, and the entire region on the western bank of the Yamuna as far north as Kelanvana. In the *Brihad-gautamiya-tantra* it says. **"The forest of Vrindavana consists of five *yojanas."*** Five *yojanas* is equal to forty miles which is the distance from Vrindavana to Nandagrama and the whole on the western bank of the Yamuna as far as Nandagrama is included in the forest of Vrindavana. Therefore when considering this vast area of Vrindavana forest, the twelve small forests or *adhivanas* are collectively known as Seva Kunja.

How To Get There: (see map no.3 & 3A)

V.18 Radha Shyamasundara Mandira

The temple of Radha Shyamasundara is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Vrindavana and was established by Shyamananda Pandita Goswami during the course of his second visit to Vrindavana. Although he was not one of the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana, he is counted amongst the famous Gaudiya Goswamis who were important followers of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The large deity of Lord Shyamasundara presently worshiped in the temple was installed by Baladeva Vidyabhushana during the period of his stay in Vrindavana during the late 17TH Century, when he reorganized the temple's deity worship in accordance with the standards of *archana-marga* instituted by the Six Goswamis. The smaller deity of Lord Shyamasundara is said by some to be the deity given as a gift to Shyamananda Pandita by Shrimati Radharani Herself, although some historians say that this small deity of Shyamasundara was actually brought by Shyamananda Pandita from Southern India and worshiped by him in Vrindavana.

Shyamananda Pandita, who was previously known as Duki, received *diksha* from one of Lord Chaitanya's personal associates named Hriday Chaitanya, who hailed from the town of Ambika Kalna in West Bengal, and after his *diksha* he became known as Krishnadasa and remained at Ambika Kalna studying under his guru. As there were many devotees called Krishnadasa, he was known as Duki Krishnadasa. Because Duki Krishnadasa (Shyamananda) showed signs that he could become a great Vaishnava scholar and preacher, his guru decided to send him to Vrindavana to study under the guidance of Shrila Jiva Goswami, and he therefore joined Jiva's other celebrated students including Shrinivasa Acharya and Narottama Dasa, who accepted him as their younger brother. Even though he was a very learned *pandita* coming from a high caste family, he would take a broom and daily sweep the area around Seva Kunja, the place where Krishna once rendered personal service to Radharani and where the celebrated *rasa-lila* pastimes took place.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.18a Shyamananda Tilak Sthana and Samadhi

Just opposite to the Radha Shyamasundara Mandira is the Tilak-sthana where Shyamananda found the ankle bell of Radharani and also the place where his *pushpa-samadhi* is situated. According to the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika*, Shyamananda Pandita was Kanaka-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

Shyamananda Discovers Radharani's Ankle-bell

There are many different of versions concerning the episode of Shyamananda, who was then known as Duki Krishnadasa, receiving the special *tilak* mark and a new name as well as a deity from Radharani, although none can be verified, the version which is accepted by the disciplic descendants of Shyamananda Pandita is as follows. One day while sweeping

Seva Kunja, Duki Krishnadasa (Shyamananda) found a golden ankle-bell (*nupur*) lying on the ground. The anklet shone very brightly and after picking it up, he was overcome with ecstatic emotions and began to cry. He concluded that the anklet must belong to one of the *gopis*, or even Shrimati Radharani Herself. He carefully wrapped the anklet in his cloth and became consumed by thoughts of Krishna's pastimes. After some time, a village girl approached him and asked if he had found a golden anklet that had been lost in Seva Kunja by her sister. Duki Krishnadasa informed the girl that he had indeed found the anklet lying on the ground and the girl asked him to give it to her and she would return it to her sister. Duki Krishnadasa told the girl that as he was the one who found the anklet, he would like to personally hand it over to her sister himself. The girl, who was actually Radha's close friend Lalita-sakhi, disguised as a local village maiden, agreed, and guided Duki Krishnadasa to Lalita-kunda in the middle of Seva Kunja. She then informed him that if he wanted to meet her sister, he would first have to bathe in the sacred *kunda*. Duki Krishnadasa immediately bathed in the *kunda* and on coming out of the water, saw that his form had changed into that of a young girl.

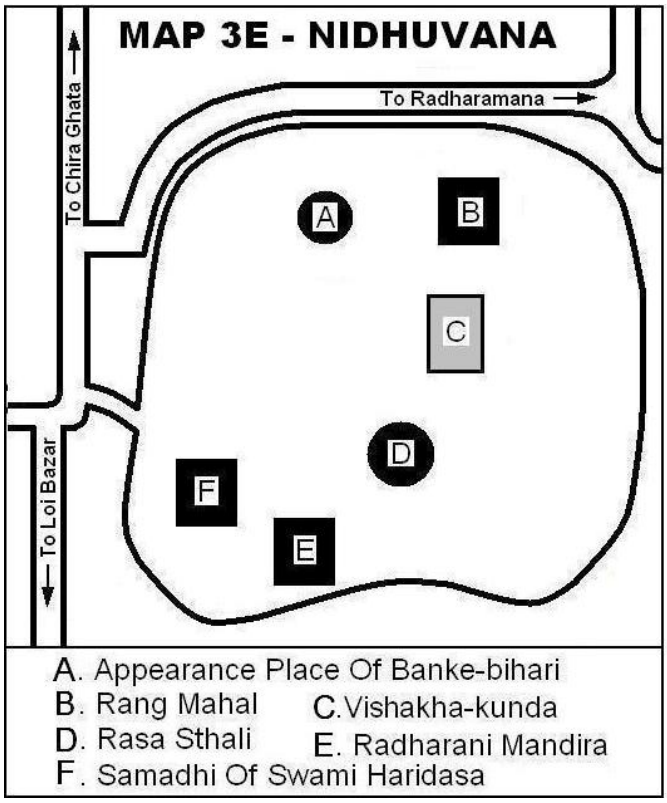
Duki Krishnadasa was then taken to a nearby grove where he suddenly saw the exquisitely beautiful and transcendental form of Shrimati Radharani, seated on a jewel-encrusted golden throne and surrounded by hundreds of Her intimate girlfriends. Radharani signaled for him to come forward and after offering his prostrated obeisance's before Her, he handed Her the golden anklet. Taking the anklet from Duki Krishnadasa, Radharani thanked him for his wonderful service of daily sweeping Her beloved Seva Kunja. She then touched the anklet to his forehead, which left a special *tilak* mark on his forehead and give him the name Shyamananda, which means one who gives pleasure (*ananda)* to Shyama, another name of Radharani (pronounced Shyaama). She then gave the anklet to Duki Krishnadasa and asked him to personally place it around Her ankle. After he had done this, Radharani asked Lalita to present Shyamananda with the gift of a beautiful deity of Lord Shyamasundara for his personal *seva-puja*. Then after once again offering his prostrated obeisance's to Shrimati Radharani, Lalita-sakhi escorted Duki Krishnadasa back to the place where she first met him, and by then he had regained his previous male form. Lalita-sakhi then requested Shyamananda not to reveal this incident to anyone.

The next day, Duki Krishnadasa was seen by Jiva Goswami and the other students with a new *tilak* mark on his forehead, which appeared somewhat different to the regular Gaudiya *tilak* mark. That night in a dream, Lalita-sakhi appeared before Jiva and informed him of the circumstances surrounding the new *tilak* mark and the new name given to Duki Krishnadasa, but told him to say nothing. After some time the news of Duki's name-change and new *tilak* mark reached the ears of Hriday Chaitanya in Bengal, who concluded that Jiva Goswami must have re-initiated his disciple. Hrdaya Chaitanya became disturbed as re-initiation amounted to a very serious Vaishnava *aparadha*. He was thinking that he had sent his disciple to study under Jiva Goswami, and now this re-initiation had occurred. Hridaya Chaitanya gathered his disciples and along with a group of senior Vaishnavas, immediately left for Vrindavana to challenge Jiva Goswami regarding the re-initiation of his disciple.

On arrival in Vrindavana, a public meeting was arranged by Hridaya Chaitanya, where Jiva Goswami was going to be asked to explain the circumstances of Duki's re-initiation. As both Jiva and Duki Krishnadasa were sworn to secrecy, the situation was very tense. That night before the meeting, Lalita-sakhi again appeared in Jiva's dream and told him what to do. When the meeting started, Jiva addressed the gathering saying he had no part in what had transpired and had not re-initiated Duki Krishnadasa as some people thought, saying that the new name and *tilak* mark was a divine transcendental arrangement. To further prove the point, he requested Hridaya Chaitanya and his followers to wipe off the new *tilak* mark from Duki Krishnadasa's body. If the new *tilak* mark could not be removed, then they would have to accept it was the divine will of the Lord. A few of the senior Vaishnavas from Hridaya Chaitanya's group came forward, but when they tried to remove the *tilak* mark, it could not be removed, no matter how hard they tried. Hridaya Chaitanya then realized that it had been some transcendental arrangement. After embracing his

disciple and apologizing to Jiva Goswami, he returned to Bengal with his party, fully satisfied that no Vaishnava *aparadh* had been committed.

Even today, those in the disciplic line of Shyamananda Pandita still apply the same *tilak* mark. It became quite common for the disciples of various Gaudiya Goswamis to adopt some variation on the standard Gaudiya Vaishnava *tilak* mark, similar to the various *tilak* marks that differentiate the four Vaishnava *sampradayas*. The *tilak* mark used by Iskcon devotees is the *tilak* mark used by Lord Chaitanya and his disciplic succession headed by Shrila Rupa Goswami.



V.19 **Nidhuvana**

Nidhuvana is one of the twelve small *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana that is also considered to be a part of the greater Seva Kunja, and the place where many transcendental pastimes including *rasa-lila* took place. It was here at Nidhuvana, just prior to the *rasa*-dance, that Krishna disappeared from the *gopis* while taking only Radharani with Him. The word *'nidhu'* means 'amorous pastimes' and *'vana'* in this regard means 'small forest'. The pastimes at Nidhuvana are similar to the pastimes at Nikunjavana, presently called Seva Kunja, and there is also a *rasa-mandala* where the *rasa-lila* took place and the Rang Mahal where Radha and Krishna would spend the night embraced in each other's arms. Near Rang Mahal is Vishakha-kunda created by Krishna for Vishakha-sakhi and the *gopis* to quench their thirst, and also the Radharani Mandira, dedicated to the pastime when Radharani stole Krishna's flute. One can also see the samadhi of Swami Haridasa who a contemporary of Shrila Jiva Goswami and was famous for composing devotional songs and singing *bhajans.* he was the guru of the famous Indian classical singer and musician named Tansen. One can also see what is believed to be the appearance place of the deity named Banke-Bihari that is said to have been discovered here by Swami Haridasa. Banke-bihari is not one of the important Vraja-*vigrahas* established by Vajranabha Maharaja.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3E)

V.20 **Chira Ghata / Chehana Ghata**

The word *'chira'* means 'clothing' or a part of a person's clothing, and because the *gopis* clothing was hidden by Krishna at this spot, the *ghata* received its name. This celebrated place on the bank of the Yamuna is the spot where Krishna rested after killing the great horse-demon Keshi, and thus it became known as Chehana Ghata. The word *'chehana'* or *'chaina'* means to 'take rest' or 'the pleasure of resting'. Lord Chaitanya also rested and bathed at this same *ghata* during His daily *parikrama* around Vrindavana.

Chira Ghata (Chehana Ghata) is different from the Chira Ghata which is situated just north of Nanda Ghata, where the *gopis* performed Katyayani Vrata and where Krishna stole their clothing in order to see their naked beauty. This fact has been confirmed by Shrila Jiva Goswami. The pastime that occurred here at this particular Chira Ghata (Chehana Ghata) in Vrindavana occurred sometime after the Katyayani Vrata and is a completely different pastime. Once, after enjoying *rasa-lila* pastimes at Seva kunja, in order to refresh themselves in the cooling waters of the Yamuna, Krishna came here with all the *gopis* and joyfully entered the river. While engaging in various sporting pastimes in the water with the *gopis*, Krishna decided to have some fun and unseen by the *gopis;* Krishna came out of the river and hid all their clothing. When the *gopis* came out of the water dressed only in their undergarments, Krishna sat in the nearby *kadamba* tree and enjoyed seeing the beauty of the *gopis* as they searched frantically here and there for their clothes. After feeling great satisfaction at the fun, Krishna very happily showed the *gopis* where their clothes lay hidden.

How To Get There: (see map no.3)

V.21 **Keshi Ghata / Keshi-tirtha**

The *Adi-varaha Purana* says. **"Keshi-tirtha, the place where Keshi was killed by Krishna, is a hundred times more sacred than the Ganges. By offering *pinda* to the forefathers at Keshi-tirtha, one attains the result of offering *pinda* in Gaya."** This is the *ghata* where Krishna bathed after slaying the horse-demon Keshi. The powerful demon arrived in the forest of Vrindavana in the form of a gigantic horse with the intention of killing Krishna. The Keshi demon was a servant of Kamsa and had been given the order to find Krishna and kill Him. This demon had been living in the area of Vraja for a long and had previously terrorized the inhabitants of the Nandagrama area during the period that Parjanya, the father of Nanda Maharaja had lived at Tagada Tirtha, consequently Parjanya's family had to move away and establish a new residence at Gokula. The great demons like Keshi, Putana, Trinavarta, Vatsasura, Aghasura, and others, having performed many years of severe penance had achieved various *siddhis* or mystical powers, and by the *siddhi* known as *kama-rupa siddhi*, they could change their physical form at will. In this regard the word '*kama'* means 'desire' and '*rupa'* means 'form', and simply by their desire they could change their form in an instant.

The Liberation of the Keshi Demon

One day, the Keshi demon heard that Krishna was wandering in the forest of Vrindavana along with His cowherd boyfriends, and immediately went there to kill Him. Being a powerful demon, he possessed the form of a gigantic horse and when he arrived there, he immediately began neighing very loudly to announce his presence.

Without wasting any time, Krishna very boldly appeared before the envious demon to accept his challenge. Making a loud whinnying sound, the Keshi demon began charging towards Krishna, kicking up large clumps of earth with his hooves as he galloped. Krishna remained steady, and as the horse demon got within reach, Krishna simply picked him up like a child picks up a flower and hurled him at least a hundred meters away. Momentarily stunned due to being thrown over such a long distance, the demon got up and after shaking his head, and once again after neighing very loudly, started to gallop at even greater speed towards Krishna hoping this time to trample Him into the ground. Waiting patiently for

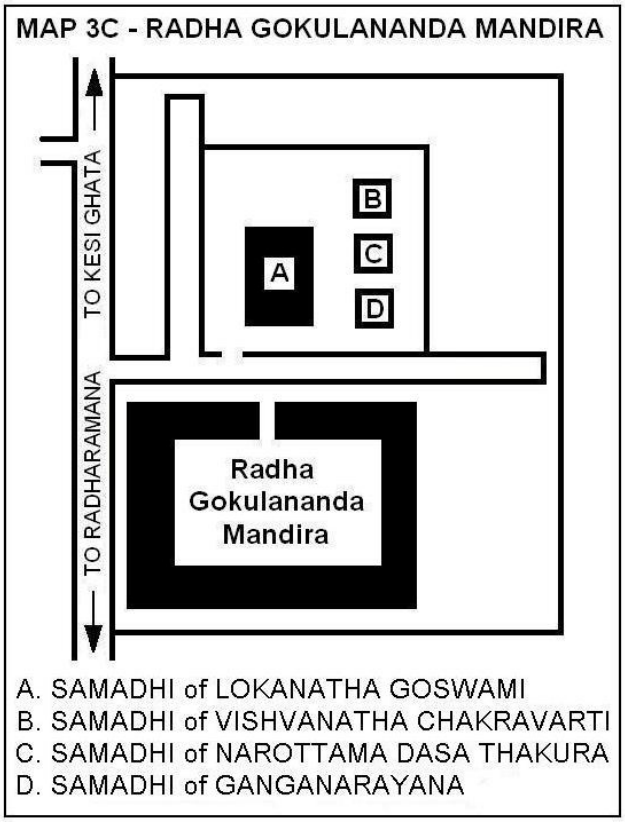
Keshi to get close enough, Krishna suddenly rammed His fist straight down the demon's throat, which instantly knocked out all his large yellow teeth. Krishna then expanded his fist to such a size; the demon could no longer breathe and suddenly found himself choking to death. As the demon's bloodshot eyes bulged from their sockets, his legs began to shake violently, and streams of sweat poured from his body. As Keshi fell to ground in great pain he passed stool and urine simultaneously as his life-air burst out from his head and merged with Krishna's lotus feet. Within moments it was all over, Krishna then proceeded to the bank of the Yamuna to wash the blood from His hands and take a purifying bath at this *ghata*, which then became celebrated as Keshi Ghata. Krishna then went to Chehana Ghata (Chira Ghata) and rested there for some time, surrounded by all His loving cowherd boyfriends.

How To Get There: (see map no.3)

V.21A **Gadadhara Dant Samadhi**

This is the place near Keshi Ghata where the tooth (*dant*) of Gadadhara Pandita was placed in *samadhi.* Gadadhara Pandita was one of Lord Chaitanya's childhood friends and remained in the association of the Lord throughout his life. He was one of the celebrated Pancha-tattva. According to *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika* he was Shrimati Radharani in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no.3)



V.22 **Radha Gokulananda Mandira**

This temple was established by Lokanatha Goswami, who in the later years of his life performed *bhajana* at this place. Although he was not one of the Six Goswamis, he was one of the renowned Gaudiya Goswamis and his temple is included amongst the famous 'Seven Goswami Temples'. Lokanatha is often referred to as being the 'Seventh Goswami' of

Vrindavana. Although the temple he founded was known as Radha Gokulananda, he himself worshiped the deity named Shri Shri Radha Vinoda, which he discovered in Kishori-kunda at Umraya. The deity of Radha Vinoda was taken out of Vrindavana during the attack on the holy city by the tyrant Aurangzeb, and is now being worshiped in Jaipura. It was around a hundred years later when the deity worshiped by Shrila Vishvanatha Chakravarti named Shri Shri Radha Gokulananda was installed in the temple. Therefore it is believed that during the time of Vishvanatha Chakravarti and his disciple Baladeva Vidyabhushana, the concept of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' came into being.

The deity of Radha Gokulananda in the temple is thought by many to be the original deity worshiped by Vishvanatha, but some others disagree, saying the original deity is in Jaipura along with Radha Vinoda. The other deities that can be seen in this temple are all *pratibhu-murtis* including; Gaura-Nitai (Narottama Dasa), Radha Vinoda (Lokanatha Goswami) Radha Vijaya-Govinda (Baladeva Vidyabhushana), and also the *pratibhu murti* of Mahaprabhu's famous Govardhana-*shila* (Raghunatha Dasa Goswami). This Govardhana-*shila* was worshiped by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who gave it as a gift to Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. The original *shila* which bears the thumb impression of Lord Chaitanya is presently being worshiped at Bhagawata Nivasa in the Ramana Reti area of Vrindavana. Within the compound of the Radha Gokulananda Mandira one can see the *samadhis* of Lokanatha Goswami, Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura, Narottama Dasa Thakura, and Ganganarayana Chakravarti.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3C)

V.22a **Lokanatha Goswami Samadhi**

It is believed that Lokanatha Goswami entered *samadhi* in the year 1583, and his sacred body was entombed here next to the temple that he founded and where he also performed *bhajana*. It is said he was born in 1483, and received instructions from Lord Chaitanya in a dream to go to Vrindavana and locate the sacred forests and Krishna's pastime places. He arrived in the holy land in 1509, accompanied by his close friend Bhugarbha Goswami, who had also received the same dream in which Lord Chaitanya told him to go to Vrindavana and locate the sacred forests. Lokanatha was an extremely humble Vaishnava and requested Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami not to mention his name in his classic Vaishnava literature *Chaitanya-charitamrta*. Due to his natural humility, he did not feel qualified to accept any disciples, although many were ready to accept him as their guru. However, Lord Chaitanya appeared to him in a dream and told him that in the future he would have to accept at least one very special devotee as his disciple, whose name would be Narottama Dasa. When eventually Narottama Dasa arrived in Vrindavana, Lokanatha was still not in the mood of initiating any disciples, but once again Lord Chaitanya appeared to him in a dream and asked him to give his mercy to Narottama Dasa; who was certainly the most worthy candidate. After receiving the dream, Lokanatha Goswami finally relented and accepted Narottama Dasa Thakura as his only disciple. According to the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika*, Lokanatha Goswami was Manjulali-manjari in Krishna's Vrndavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3C)

V.22b **Narottama Dasa Thakura Puspa Samadhi**

This is the *pushpa samadhi* of Shrila Narottama Dasa Thakura who entered *samadhi* while in Bengal in the year 1611. This *pushpa samadhi* contains a flower garland worn by Narottama Dasa, his outer cloth, a *kaupina*, and his *japa* beads. He was the only disciple of Lokanatha Goswami and became famous for the large number of devotional songs that he wrote. He was a greatly celebrated singer of *kirtanas* as well as an exceptionally good *mrdanga* player. He was also a powerful preacher of Mahaprabhu's mission and converted thousands to the *bhakti* cult of Lord Chaitanya in Bengal and Assam, as well as the state of Manipura, where he was the first to introduce the *sankirtana* movement.

Some years before Narottama's birth, Lord Chaitanya was on a tour of Bengal where he visited Navadwipa and then Ramakeli, which is now in Bangladesh, where He met the

brothers Rupa, Sanatana and Sri Vallabha, who were at that time still engaged in Government service. While there, Lord Chaitanya went to take His bath in the nearby Padma River. On the opposite bank of the river was a village called Kheturi, where in the future Narottama Dasa would be born. While gazing into the water, Lord Chaitanya began to call out in a very ecstatic mood. "O Narottama! O Narottama!" Lord Chaitanya then informed the devotees accompanying Him, that in the future a very great personality would be born at Kheturi, his name would be Narottama and he would become so absorbed in *nama-kirtana-rasa*, it would be equal to the *nama-sankirtana-rasa* experienced by Lord Chaitanya Himself. The Lord also told the devotees that He would now bathe in the River Padma, and later when Narottama would come there to bathe in the same river, the waters of the river would extend to Narottama the Lord's special mercy and divine love.

In the year 1534, the same year as Lord Chaitanya's disappearance, Narottama Dasa took birth in the village of Kheturi. His father was a *kayastha*, who are considered by many to be *sudras*, while they generally believe they are *ksatriyas.* Narottama's father however, was accepted as a king, due to his great wealth and ownership of vast tracts of land. As a boy, Narottama was a brilliant student and loved to hear about the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. When he reached his teens, one night he had a dream in which Lord Nityananda appeared before him and told him. "Tomorrow morning you should take your bath in the River Padma, at that time you will receive Krishna-*prema*, pure love of God." On waking the next morning, Narottama went immediately to the River Padma and on entering the water, experienced a sudden spiritual transformation. As Narottama became overcome with ecstasy, Lord Chaitanya suddenly appeared before him and embraced him within His arms, and Narottama felt the spirit of the Lord enter his heart. At that moment, Narottama's dark complexion turned a molten gold, the same color as Lord Chaitanya's transcendental body. On coming out of the water, Narottama began dancing in ecstasy up and down the river bank loudly chanting the holy names of the Lord. As the morning wore on, suddenly realizing that Narottama was missing from home, his anxious parents came to the riverbank in search of their son. When they saw a golden complexioned youth dancing in ecstasy on the river bank, they could not at first recognize him as being their son, because his dark complexion and physical demeanor had so drastically changed. Eventually, they realized that this was in fact their son, and they immediately brought him back to their home. When they got their son home, they noticed that he was a completely changed person, who continually chanted the holy names of Krishna both day and night.

After some months, Narottama had another dream where Lord Chaitanya appeared before him and after tightly embracing him, ordered him to immediately leave for Vrindavana where he should accept Lokanatha Goswami as his spiritual master. Very soon after this dream, Narottama ran away from home and proceeded to Vrindavana, much to the despair of his loving parents. On arrival in Vrindavana, Narottama immediately went to see the deity of Govindaji, and upon beholding Lord Govinda's beautiful form, fell unconscious on the ground while exhibiting all the eight symptoms of ecstatic love known as *ashta-satvika-bhava*. The news quickly spread about this most unusual incident and Jiva Goswami immediately came to the Govindaji Mandira to see Narottama. Some of the devotees in Vrindavana had heard about the predictions made by Lord Chaitanya and had been wondering when Narottama would appear. Narottama was immediately placed under the care of Lokanatha Goswami, who was engaged in *bhajan* and *seva-puja* of his deity Radha-Vinoda, in a garden near Keshi Ghata where the Gokulananda Mandira was later built. As Narottama had been informed in a dream by Lord Chaitanya to accept Lokanatha Goswami as his guru, he diligently performed all kinds of menial service for Lokanatha, who had also been told in a dream by Lord Chaitanya to accept Narottama as his disciple. Nevertheless, due to his great humility, he did not feel qualified to initiate anyone, and therefore declined. Regardless, Narottama continued to offer his menial service to Lokanatha and would even clean the area in the jungle which was used by Lokanatha as a toilet. Lokanatha then had another dream, where Lord Chaitanya again appeared and reminded Lokanatha that it was the Lord's own cherished desire that he should accept Narottama as his disciple and initiate him. After receiving this dream, Lokanatha relented and accepted Narottama as his only

disciple and requested Jiva Goswami to accept Narottama as his *sikhsa* disciple and train him in all the aspects of Vaishnava philosophy. Narottama then became part of Jiva Goswami's famous troika of *siksa* disciples, along with Shrinivasa Acharya and Shyamananda Pandita.

In the year 1582, Jiva Goswami sent these three illustrious and most brilliant students on a preaching mission to Bengal and Orissa, by bullock cart with a large trunk of books written by the Six Goswamis that had all been copied by hand and were to be distributed amongst the followers of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This was the first ever book distribution party in the history of the Gaudiya *sampradaya.* After reaching Bengal, Narottama Dasa returned to his home village of Kheturi and organized what was to become the first ever 'Gaura-purnima Festival' celebrating the appearance day of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. All the followers of Lord Chaitanya attended the festival including Jahnava Mata and her son Virabhadra. During the festival, with the help of Shrinivasa Acharya, Narottama installed five sets of deities for the benefit of the devotees. One of those deities, Radha Vraja-mohana, is still being worshiped in Vrindavana at Gyana-gudri. Narottama had one very close and dearly beloved companion named Ramacandra Kaviraja, and one important disciple named Ganganarayana Chakravarti, and they both expertly assisted Narottama Dasa in his life's mission of spreading the divine message of Lord Chaitanya to every town and village. According to the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika*, Narottama dasa was Vilasa-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3C)

V.22c **Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura Samadhi**

Shrila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura entered *samadhi* in the year 1708, and his sacred body was entombed here in the garden of the Radha Gokulananda Mandira. He was born into a *brahmana* family of Nadia District in 1638. As a student he became an expert scholar of Sanskrit, philosophy, rhetoric, and poetry, and could easily defeat anyone in an open debate. He was the *diksha* disciple of the illustrious Vaishnava guru Radharamana Chakravarti and accepted Narottama Dasa Thakura as his *sisha-guru*. Vishvanatha was married at a very early age by his parents as it was the local custom in Bengal at the time, but had absolutely no interest in family affairs. He immediately left home and went to Vrindavana, where he performed *bhajana* on the banks of Radha-kunda and stayed in the old *bhajana kutira* of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami. After some time, he returned to his home in Nadia, where, at the insistence of his parents, his guru implored him to at least spend one night in the bed of his young wife. He obeyed the order of his guru, but after lying in bed with his very beautiful young wife, he spent the whole night chanting the holy names of the Lord. His parents were disappointed, but his guru was delighted at his sense control realizing he was actually a very advanced Vaishnava.

His guru took him to stay in his own house and engaged him in making a copy of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam,* which in those days was done by hand and took a considerable time. While intensely copying the *Bhagavatam*, Vishvanatha would sometimes enter into trance and exhibit ecstatic symptoms. On another occasion, the sun was beating down, but the spot where Vishvanatha sat appeared to be in the shade. Another time it began raining, but the place where Vishvanatha sat, no rain could be seen falling. A local landowner personally witnessed this event and broadcast the news throughout the village, much to the humble Vishvanatha's embarrassment. After some time, his guru Radharamana Chakravarti, told Vishvanatha to return to Vrindavana and continue with his activities of serving the mission of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Vishvanatha returned and again took shelter at Radha-kunda, where he began writing a number of important books. He also composed many devotional songs of which the most famous is *Shri Shri Gurv-ashtaka*, the famous prayer to the spiritual master sung in all Iskcon temples during the *mangala arati* ceremony each morning.

When he returned to the holy Dhama, he was presented with the deity of Radha Gokulananda by a *brahmachari*, who while visiting Mathura, had received a dream in which the deity informed the *brahmachari* that He wanted to be worshiped by Visvanatha. Not knowing who Vishvanatha was, the *brahmachari* had to search for him. When the

brahmachary found Vishvanatha, he was reluctant to accept the deity because being a mendicant; he lived by begging alms and could not provide the deity with the requisite standard of worship, therefore feeling disappointed the *brahmachari* left. That night, Vishvanatha received a dream in which the Lord informed him that he should accept the deity and worship Him in whatever way he could, as this would make the Lord very happy. The *brahmachari* also had a dream in which the Lord told him to return again and this time Visvanatha would accept the deity, which he did. While Vishvanatha was staying at Radha-kunda, he also took over the worship of the famous Govardhana-*sila* given to Raghunatha Dasa Goswami by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3C)

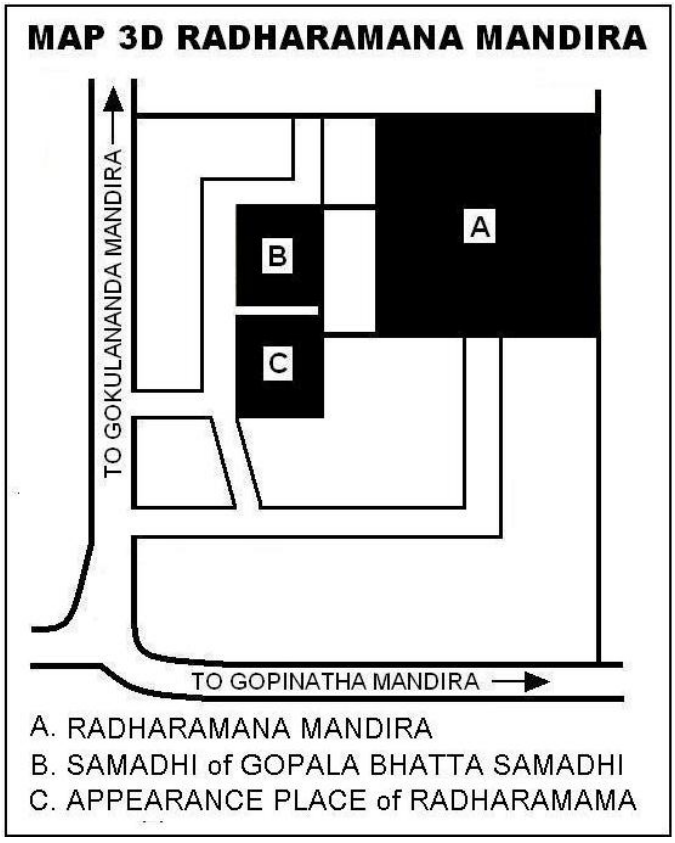
V.23 **Radharamana Mandira**

This is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' and was established by Gopala Bhatta Goswami, one of the famous Six Goswamis of Vrindavana. The deity of Radharamana suddenly self-manifested one day from a *shalagrama-shila* just for the pleasure of Gopala Bhatta. All *shalagrama-shilas* are considered to be a natural manifestation of Lord Vishnu and are therefore immediately worshipable and do not need to be installed. The *shalagrama-shila* is a sacred black stone that is worshiped specifically by *brahmanas* and must be worshiped in all Vedic sacrifices as the *yajna-pati*, or principle enjoyer of the sacrifice. The *shalagram-shila* is also an essential part of deity worship being the principle recipient of the *seva-puja*, and no worship is considered complete without the *shaligrama-shila* being worshiped as the *seva-pati*.

The story regarding the amazing *shalagrama-shila* of Gopala Bhatta is as follows. After spending a number of years studying and writing in the company of the Goswamis of Vrindavana, Gopala Bhatta decided to make the arduous journey to the holy place known as Muktinatha in the Himalayas, where there is a famous shrine of Lord Vishnu. One day while taking his bath in the sacred Kali Gandaki River that flows in the region of Muktinatha, Gopala Bhatta scooped water with his *kamandal* and was about to pour it over his head, when he found that a number of black stones known as s*halagrama-shilas* had somehow or other entered his *kamandal*, perhaps due to the strong currents in the river. After putting them back into the Gandaki, he again scooped water with his *kamandala* and found that a number of *shilas* had once again entered his *kamandala* Surprised at this; he again put them back into the river, but when this happened for a third time, he realized it was the plan of the Lord and decided to keep all the *shilas* that had entered his *kamandala*. He carefully tied them in a cloth and kept it suspended around his neck for safety. The Kali Gandaki River, which starts high-up in the Himalayan Mountains in what is now Nepal, is the only river in the world where these sacred *shalagrama-shilas* can be found.

When Gopala Bhatta eventually returned to Vrindavana, he performed his *bhajana* in a corner of Nidhuvana where he also began worshiping the *shalagrama-shilas* he had obtained from the Kali Gandaki. At night, Gopala Bhatta would place all the *shalagrama-shilas* in a cloth bag and hang them in a nearby tree while he took rest. One day while worshiping the *shalagrama-shilas*, he began lamenting that he did not have an *archa-vigraha* or deity of Lord Krishna like the other Goswamis, which he could dress with beautiful clothing, ornaments, crowns, and other deity paraphernalia. The following day was *Nasasingha-chaturdasi*, the appearance day of Lord Narasinghadeva, the half-man half-lion incarnation of Vishnu who appeared from a rock pillar. Early the next morning when Gopala Bhatta went to worship his *shalagrama-shilas*, to his utter amazement he found that one of the *shilas* had opened up and transformed into a beautiful deity of Krishna, standing in the *tri-bhanga-rupa*, or the three-fold bending form and playing a flute. On hearing the news of the miracle, the other Goswamis immediately came to congratulate Gopala Bhatta on his amazingly good fortune and to see for themselves the exquisite beauty of the self-manifested deity, which stood about ten inches high. The Goswamis gave the deity the name 'Radharamana' which means 'one who gives pleasure to Radha'. When the deity is being dressed in the morning, or during *abhisheka* ceremonies, one can clearly see half of the *shalagrama-shila* from which the deity appeared, still attached to deities back. The actual

place where the deity of Radharamana self-manifested from a *shaligrama-shila* can be seen in a courtyard next to the s*amadhi*. An off-shoot of the original tree where Gopala Bhatta used to hang his *shaligrama-shilas* in a cloth bag can also be seen here.
How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3D)



V.23a **Gopala Bhatta Goswami Samadhi**

Shrila Gopala Bhatta Goswami entered *samadhi* in the year 1585, and his sacred body was entombed at this spot where he performed his *bhajana* and worshiped his deity named Radharamana. In the Samadhi Mandira one can see the *choki* or small wooden sitting place and the *chaddar* or woolen shawl, given as a gift to Gopala Bhatta by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Gopala Bhatta, who was born in the year 1503, first met Lord Chaitanya during his childhood at Shrirangam (Rangapatnam) in Tamil Nadu, during the Lord's tour of South India in 1511. When Lord Chaitanya arrived at Shrirangam, He met Gopala Bhatta's father whose name was Venkata Bhatta, in the famous temple of Seshashayi Vishnu, also known as the Ranganatha Mandira. After seeing the transcendental beauty of Lord Ranganatha, Lord Chaitanya chanted the holy names and danced in ecstasy before the deity. Venkata Bhatta, who was a *sevak* in the temple, also joined Lord Chaitanya, and chanted and danced along with the Lord in an ecstatic mood. After the *kirtan* ended, Venkata Bhatta invited Lord Chaitanya to his residence for *prashadam*, and also requested Him to spend the entire rainy season at his home in Shrirangam. During the four months of the monsoon season, when it rains very heavily, especially in South India, *sannyasis* and other traveling mendicants generally remain in one place, therefore Lord Chaitanya very happily accepted Venkata Bhatta's proposal.

Venkata Bhatta was a pure Vaishnava of the Shri *sampradaya* and was a priest at the temple of Rangaji, every day during Lord Chaitanya's stay at his residence; he would discuss

the transcendental topics of Krishna-*katha* with Lord Chaitanya. While the Lord was staying at Venkata Bhatta's house, the young Gopala Bhatta also had the opportunity to hear all the transcendental topics as well as render service to Lord Chaitanya, including honoring the remnants of Mahaprabhu's *prashadam*. Lord Chaitanya, who could recognize the devotional qualities of the young Gopala Bhatta, told him not to marry and in the future, when he was old enough, he should go and stay in Vrindavana. Lord Chaitanya also met Gopala Bhatta's uncle, Prabhodananda Saraswati, who was one of the greatest scholars of the Shri *sampradaya*, and was also the initiating spiritual master of Gopala Bhatta. Probhodananda was also responsible for the education of Gopala and trained him in Sanskrit grammar, philosophy, rhetoric, poetry, and all the important aspects of Vedic culture. Under the expert guidance of Prabhodananda Saraswati, Gopala Bhatta's scholarship was unparalleled. While Lord Chaitanya stayed at Shrirangam, Prabhodananda Saraswati also had the opportunity to discuss philosophy with Lord Chaitanya and was so impressed with the Lord's precepts and teachings, that he left the Shri *sampradaya* and became an ardent follower of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*, and eventually went to live in Vrindavana where he spent the remainder of his life.

After the death of his parents, Gopala Bhatta left for Vrindavana to take shelter of Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis. Lord Caitanya had already informed the two Goswamis that Gopala Bhatta would one day join them in Vrindavana, and they immediately accepted him as their younger god-brother. It is believed that Gopala Bhatta, who was an expert in the subject of deity worship, made significant contributions to Sanatana Goswami's celebrated book, the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* and also helped to edit it. The *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* delineates the principles of devotional service as well as the authorized Vedic system of deity worship. Gopala Bhatta is also credited for helping to originate the six theses for Jiva Goswami's famous *Sat Sandharbha*. Gopala Bhatta most celebrated disciple was Shrinivasa Acharya, and according to the *Gaura-gannodesha-dipika*, Gopala Bhatta Goswami was Guna-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3 & 3D)

V.24 Radha Gopinatha Mandira

The temple of Radha Gopinatha is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' and was established by Shrila Madhu Pandita Goswami who was an important follower of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Although he was not directly one of the Six Goswamis, he is one of the important Gaudiya Goswamis of Vrindavana. The deity of Lord Gopinatha was originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja at Vamsi Vata five thousand years earlier. Then during the period of the Six Goswamis the deity of Lord Gopinatha was rediscovered at Vamsi Vata lying buried in the ground near the famous banyan tree. Madhu Pandita Goswami came to Vrindavana and was searching everywhere for the deity of Lord Gopinatha. Not finding the deity anywhere, and feeling great sorrow, Madhu Pandita gave up eating food and sat at Vamsi Vata while shedding a constant stream of tears.

As it was the monsoon season there was a great flood in Vrindavana and the River Yamuna overflowed her banks. The force of the flood waters apparently swept away the old banyan tree that stood at Vamsi Vata and when the flood waters receded, the deity was seen half-buried in the ground by Madhu Pandita's close friend and companion named Paramananda Bhattacharya, just beneath where the old banyan tree had once stood. Paramananda immediately called his friend Madhu Pandita who retrieved the deity. The deity was then moved to the spot where the present Gopinatha temple now stands. The original Gopinatha Mandira is believed to have opened in 1589, and was built by Raja Saganji, one of the Shekawat princes of Rajasthana. After being desecrated by Aurangzeb's soldiers in 1670, a new temple was constructed next to the original one.

The Gopinatha Mandira is the only temple where one can see the deity of Ananga-manjari on the altar. Ananga-manjari is Radharani's younger sister and can be seen standing on the left-hand side of Lord Gopinatha's, with Radharani standing on the right. This is most unusual because Radharani always stands on the left-hand side of Krishna in all other temples. There is a very interesting story surrounding this unusual event. When Lord

Nityananda's wife, Jahnava Mata, visited Vrindavana on pilgrimage in the year 1582, she felt that the deity of Radharani being worshiped in the temple was far too small, and when she returned to Bengal she asked one of her disciples to carve a new deity of Radharani for the Gopinatha temple. This new deity was then sent to Vrindavana and immediately installed next to Lord Gopinatha. When all the devotees in Vrindavana saw the new deity of Radharani, they felt that it looked just like Jahnava Mata. This happened because the devotee who carved the deity, being a disciple of Jahnava Mata, had modeled it on the beautiful features of Jahnava Mata herself. After consulting with all the senior Vaishnavas, it was decided that the deity was actually Ananga-manjari, who in Chaitanya-*lila* appeared as Jahnava Mata, Lord Nityananda's consort. Because the deity of Ananga-manjari had already been installed on the right side of Lord Gopinatha, it was felt that it must have been prearranged by Lord Gopinatha Himself, and should therefore not be moved, but remain there on the left side of Lord Gopinatha. The smaller deity of Radharani was then placed to the right of Lord Gopinatha where she remains even today. All the devotees felt that due to Ananga-manjari's deep desire to serve Lord Gopinatha, out of compassion and love for Her younger sister, Radharani elevated her to Her own position on the left of Krishna.

At the present time one can see the *pratibhu*-deities of Radha Gopinatha being worshiped here in this temple and Ananga Manjari can still be seen standing on the left of Lord Gopinatha with Radharani standing on the right. This same arrangement occurs in all the various Gopinatha temples in Vraja including the two Gopinatha temples at Radha-kunda, as well as in Jaipura where the original deity Of Lord Gopinatha is now being worshiped. The *samadhi* of Madhu Pandita Goswami can also be seen near the eastern gate of the Gopinatha Mandira.

How To Get There: (see map no.3)

V.25 **Dhira Samira / Dhira Samira Ghata**

After enjoying *rasa-lila* pastimes, Krishna came here with all the *gopis* to relax on the banks of the Yamuna where there was always a very cooling breeze. The words *'dhira samira'* means a 'gentle breeze'. After resting here for some time, Krishna and the *gopis* would enter the crystal clear waters of the Yamuna and refresh themselves by swimming and sporting in the river. After feasting on various forest fruits, Krishna expanded Himself by His *yogamaya* potency and simultaneously enters the many flower bedecked bowers *(kunjas*) to lie down on a bed of flower petals next to each *gopi*. In this way Krishna fulfilled the desire of each *gopi*, to spend the night holding Krishna in their arms and embracing Him to their hearts content. Krishna had given a promise to the *gopis* when He stole their garments during the Katyayani-vrata, that in the near future they would be able to enjoy Him as their husband in the forest groves of Vrindavana, thus Krishna fulfilled His promise to the *gopis.*

In the area of Dhira Samira, there was a forest grove known as Manikarnika and within that grove is the Mana-bhanjana Sthala where Krishna very expertly dissipated the jealous anger of Shrimati Radharani. The word *'mana'* means 'jealous anger' and *'bhanjana'* means to 'break' or 'terminate'. The bank of the Yamuna at Dhira Samira was a very beautiful place where cool breezes always blew due to the flow of the river and many great Vaishnava saints performed their *bhajana* and engaged in the worship of their deities in this area.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.25a **Shrinivasa Acharya Kunja**

This is where Shrinivasa Acharya, the famous disciple of Gopala Bhatta Goswami performed his *bhajana* and worshiped the deity known as Jula Thakura, which is still being worshiped in this temple. His *samadhi* can also be seen next to the temple.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.25b **Radha Shyama-raya Mandira**

At this place Gauridasa Pandita the famous disciple of Lord Nityananda and the intimate associate of Lord Chaitanya, performed his *bhajana* and worshiped the deities Radha Shyama-raya. His *pushpa samadhi* can also be seen here.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.25c **Radha Kanta Mandira**

Gopala Guru was a disciple of Vakreshwara Pandita and met Lord Chaitanya in his childhood. He studied under both Swarupa Damodara and Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. He worshiped the deity of Radha Kanta at this place where he performed *his bhajana* and where the deity is still being worshiped by his disciplic descendents. His *pushpa samadhi* can also be seen next to the temple.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.26 **Vamsi Vata**

The word *'vamsi'* means 'flute and *'vata'* means a 'banyan tree'. This is the famous banyan tree under which Krishna stood and by playing on His flute, He would call all the *gopis* of Vraja to join Him in the forest of Vrindavana. Upon hearing the enchanting music emanating from Krishna's flute, regardless of what they were doing, the *gopis* dropped everything and ran to Vamsi Vata, knowing that Krishna wanted to enjoy Himself in their company. So intense was their love for Krishna, that they were ready to abandon their homes, husbands, children, and even their reputation as chaste women, in order to satisfy Krishna's desires. After reaching Vamsi Vata, Krishna and the *gopis* would spend the entire night enjoying amorous pastimes in the various groves of the sacred forest.

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"Please see the wonderfully beautiful Vamsi Vata on the bank of the Yamuna, the shade of the Vamsi Vata tree removes the distress of the world. Lord Gopinatha eternally enjoys His pastimes here. His attractive dress enchants the world and His movements are flawless as the sound of His flute attracts the *gopis*."** In the *Chaitanya-charitamrta* it is said. **"Lord Gopinatha, who originated the transcendental mellow of the *rasa*-dance, stands on the shore in Vamsa Vata and attracts the attention of the cowherd damsels with the sound of His celebrated flute. May they all confer upon us their benediction."** At Vamsi Vata one can see the offshoot of the original banyana tree that was growing here during Krishna's pastimes as well as a *simhasana* and *rasa-mandala* commemorating the *rasa-lila* that took place here.

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.27 **Gopishwara Mahadeva Mandira**

This temple of Lord Shiva near Vamsi Vata contains one of the famous *dig-pala* deities established by Vajranabha that protect the holy Dhama of Vrindavana. The name 'Gopishwara' means the 'protector' as well as 'benefactor' of the *gopis*. The word *'ishvara'* means 'the protector' or 'the controller' and is a general term used to denote the Supreme Lord or His incarnations. Because the *gopis* worshiped this deity of Lord Shiva so that they could achieve Krishna as their husband, he became known by the name Gopisha. In the *Vraja-riti-chintamani* it says. **"North of Brahma-kunda is Gopisha where, worshiped by them, Lord Siva pleased the *gopis* hearts by giving them the benediction to enjoy pastimes with Lord Krishna."**

There is a famous story which has become part of *Vrajavasi* folklore regarding the name Gopishwara, which is said to have been given to Lord Shiva by Krishna Himself. This pastime occurred during a performance of the *rasa-lila* at Vamsi Vata. Lord Shiva, who very much desired to witness the *rasa*-dance between Krishna and the *gopis*, once arrived at the *rasa-mandala* where he was stopped by some of the *gopis* headed by Lalita and Vishakha. The *gopis* informed Lord Shiva that no male was allowed to enter into the *rasa-mandala*, and even though he was qualified in every respect to witness the *rasa*-dance, he would have to change his form to that of a *gopi* if he wanted to enter. Lalita advised Lord Shiva to first take bath in the Manasarovara Lake and then return to the *rasa-mandala*. After bathing in

Manasarovara, Lord Siva obtained the form of a *gopi* and when he returned to the *rasa-mandala* in his *gopi* form he was greeted by Krishna, who, upon seeing the new *gopi* awarded her the name Gopishwara and requested that she should protect all the *gopis* and the *rasa-mandala*. Some of the *gopis* then escorted the new *gopi* named Gopishwara to a corner of the *rasa-mandala* to sit down and witness the *rasa-lila* pastimes of Radha and Krishna. Some have said that Shiva took bath in Brahma-kunda to achieve the form of a *gopi*.
How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.28 **Brahma-kunda**

It was here at Brahma-kunda that Shrila Rupa Goswami discovered the deity of Vrinda Devi that was lying hidden on northern bank of the *kunda*, after the goddess herself appeared in a dream and informed him where she could be found. The deity of Vrinda Devi, the presiding deity of Vrindavana forest, and is said to have been originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja. Some scholars have said that this sacred *kunda* was formed from the tears of Lord Brahma, who sat here for sometime after he realized his mistake of having stolen Krishna's calves and cowherd boyfriends. In the *Varaha Purana* it says. **"A person who fasts thru the night and bathes in beautiful Brahma-kunda, which is surrounded by many trees and vines, enjoys pastimes with the Gandharvas and Apsaras. Leaving one's body here, he goes to my abode."**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "See this place Brahma-kunda which is very secluded and beautified by many creepers and plants. At this place, Vrinda Devi disclosed her mind and fulfilled the desires of Narada Muni."** With regard to this verse from *Bhakti-ratnakara*, some commentators have said that it refers to Vrinda Devi having revealed to Rupa Goswami in a dream where she was located. Regarding the second part of the verse, some say it refers to her advising Narada on how to achieve the form of a *gopi* in order to enter the *rasa-mandala*, but according to most authorities, Narada bathed in Kusuma-sarovara to obtain the form of a *gopi*, and this is also confirmed by Vishvanatha Chakravarti in *Vraja-riti-chintamani*. Some have proposed that Lord Shiva also bathed in Brahma-kunda in order to achieve the form of a *gopi* so that he could also enter the *rasa-mandala* to witness the *rasa*-dance, although the general opinion is that he bathed in Manasarovara.
How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

V.29 **Radha Govinda Mandira**

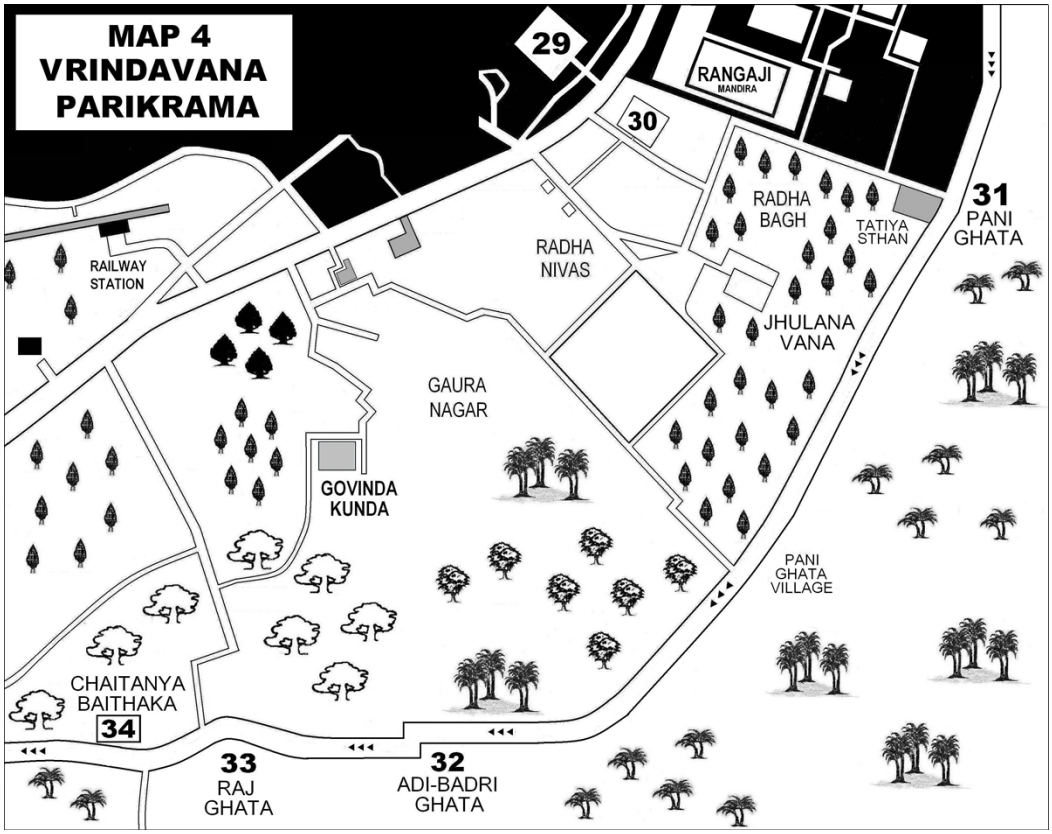
This is one of the famous 'Seven Goswami Temples' that was established by Shrila Rupa Goswami, who discovered the deity of Lord Govinda buried in the ground at the site where the majestic temple of Govindaji now stands. The deity of Govindaji was originally established five thousand years earlier by Krishna's great grandson Vajranabha Maharaja, at the place known as the Govindaji *yoga-pitha*. After the discovery of the deity, a small shrine was immediately established and the worship of the deity began. There are no records of the actual date when the first *seva-puja* of the deity was performed by Shrila Rupa Goswami, but it was definitely sometime before 1534, the year in which Lord Chaitanya disappeared,
because after hearing about the discovery of the deity, Lord Chaitanya had personally sent some of the devotees from Puri to assist Rupa Goswami in the worship of Govindaji. Rupa Goswami also discovered the deity of Vrinda Devi at Brahma-kunda and she was installed in a separate shrine to the left of the main deity room. This shrine stands directly above the actual a hole within the ground where Govindaji was discovered by Rupa. This shrine which is below ground had its own temple tower and adjoins the southern side of the main temple and is the actual site of the Yoga-pitha

When Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu directed Rupa Goswami to go to Vrindavana, He asked him to fulfill four important tasks including; excavation of the lost holy places, write books on devotional service, establish the principles of deity worship, and build temples, He also asked Rupa to specifically find the long-lost deity of Govindaji, the presiding deity of the northern petal of the lotus of Vraja Mandala. After arriving in Vrindavana and having searched for many days, Rupa could not find the location of the Yoga-pitha, where the deity

of Govindaji was supposedly hidden. It is said that one day, after searching without success, feeling somewhat despondent, Rupa Goswami went to sit near the bank of the Yamuna, probably at nearby Pani Ghata, and was lamenting to himself saying, "Oh Chaitanya Oh Chaitanya" Suddenly, a charming young cowherd boy came there and asked the cause of Rupa's despondency. After hearing about Rupa's search for Govindaji, the boy informed him that a cow was going every day to a nearby *tila* or small hill, and was pouring milk from its udder into a hole in the ground. The cowherd boy asked Rupa to see what was in the hole. Realizing that this could be the clue that he had been looking for, Rupa went to the hill where the hole was located. On reaching the spot, Rupa peered into the hole in the earth and suddenly had the spiritual realization that this was the celebrated Yoga-pitha. Rupa began to feel a sudden rush of ecstatic symptoms throughout his being and momentarily fell unconscious. On regaining his senses, Rupa concluded within his mind that the boy must have been Krishna Himself, disguised as a local cowherd boy, who had guided him to the spot. Rupa Goswami soon summoned a few devotees and some locals and they carefully started digging their way into the hole. Just a few feet below the surface they suddenly saw the deity of Govindaji. Loud cries of Jaya Govinda! Jaya Gopala! rent the air as they slowly hauled the deity out of the hole. After performing an *abhishekha* and instillation ceremony, the worship of the beautiful deity of Lord Govindaji began once again after a lapse of almost five thousand years. On hearing about the wonderful discovery of the deity of Govindaji, Lord Chaitanya sent some of His followers from Puri to help Rupa in the Deity worship, so that Rupa might continue with the important work of further excavation of Vrindavana's holy places and the writing books.

Some years after the discovery of Govindaji, in far away Orissa, the son of Prataparudra Maharaja whose name was Purushottama, had a dream one night in which a deity being worshiped in the Jagannatha Temple as Lakshmi Devi, appeared before him and said, "I am not Lakshmi but Radharani, and I have been waiting for my beloved Govinda to again manifest in Vrindavana, so therefore please send Me to Vrindavana." After receiving the dream, Purushottama consulted with the temple priests, temple authorities, and senior Vaishnavas, and after everyone agreed the deity of Lakshmi Devi was sent to Vrindavana. The deity was then installed on the *simhasana* as Radharani and placed on the left side of Lord Govinda. This was the first installation of a deity of Radharani anywhere in the world. After this famous episode, gradually other deities of Radharani were installed in all the Goswami temples in Vrindavana and thus the Gaudiya Vaisinava tradition of establishing temples with the deities of both Radha and Krishna began. The exact date when the instillation of Radharani at the Govindaji Mandira took place is not known, but it would appear to have been sometime after the disappearance in 1564 of Shrila Rupa Goswami, and before 1582, when there is historical evidence showing that deities of Radharani were present in many Gaudiya Goswami temples in Vrindavana. The instillation of Radharani at the Govindaji Mandira must have occurred during the time when Shrila Jiva Goswami was the *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*. Previous to the time when deities of Radharani were installed in the on the altar, it was accepted that Radharani was automatically present along with Krishna in Her unmanifested form as *hladini-shakti*, the internal pleasure potency of Krishna, because Radha and Krishna can never be separated and are eternally one and the same. It has also been said that Prataparudra's son sometime later sent another deity of Radharani to be installed in the Madana-mohana Mandira.

After the historic visit of Emperor Akbar to Vrindavana in 1570, the king of Jaipura and commander of Akbar's army, Raja Man Singh, an ardent follower of the Vrindavana Goswamis and a disciple of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, requested permission from Akbar to construct the Govindaji Mandira and other Goswami temples in Vrindavana. Akbar gave his approval and also offered to provide high quality red sandstone from which the Govindaji Mandira was built. This rare sandstone had previously been reserved exclusively for Mughal palaces and forts. Although Rupa Goswami had by this time already entered *samadhi*, the construction began under the guidance of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami and was supervised



by Raja Man Singh. The Govindaji Mandira, which opened in 1590, became the most impressive edifice that 'Hindu art' had ever produced in the whole of Northern India. The intricate carving of the sandstone and the series of balconies and intricately carved archways that can be seen around the entire structure is unique. A separate shrine was also constructed at the actual site of the Yoga-pitha where the deities of Vrinda Devi and Yogamaya Devi were installed.

The temple construction was supervised by the king of Jaipura, Raja Man Singh, and all the top architects, engineers, and stone masons, were employed in constructing this temple, which was recognized as one of the greatest temples in India. This temple combined elements of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic architecture, and therefore, besides looking like a traditional Hindu temple, it unique design bore a striking resemblance to both a mosque and a cathedral

How To Get There: (see map no. 3)

The Tyrant Aurangzeb Attacks the Govindaji Mandira

It is often said that the temple towered seven stories into the sky, but this referred only to the temple turret, not the entire structure. By observing the architecture of the temple, and other temples of the same design, there would not have been any more than the three floors that are seen today; otherwise the entire architectural beauty of the building would have been lost. In temple architecture, the ratio between the height of the main structure, and the height of the temple turret, must be in conformity with standard temple design mentioned in the *Vedas*. To calculate the height of the temple turret, which is called the *shikara,* one must calculate the size of its foundations, therefore, from this measurement one can understand that its height would have been about seven stories, and from this one can also calculate the exact height of the main structure, called the *kirtana mandapa*, which according to the standard ratio between *shikara* and *mandap*, could not have be more than three floors.

More importantly, from the engineering stand-point, there is no superstructure to support any further floors above the three floors that exist today. Another fact is that because the Govindaji Mandira was built during the Mughal era, it combines Hindu, Christian and Islamic architectural traditions, and a dome is always placed on top of a building to signify its highest point or pinnacle. The *kirtana mandap* of the temple is finished with a dome which rises above the height of the third floor, creating in a sense, a forth level, which is surrounded by decorative arches. Similar decorative arches and *chattris* would also have also run around the roof-top of the third floor, but merely as a decorative embellishment. The large dome above the *kirtana mandapa* also signifies the sacredness of the *Hare-nama kirtana* being performed below. It would have been totally against 'Hindu' tradition to build any further floors above the *kirtana mandapa*, as no one was allowed to place their feet or walk above the *kirtana mandapa*, where the *Hare-nama kirtana* was being performed below.

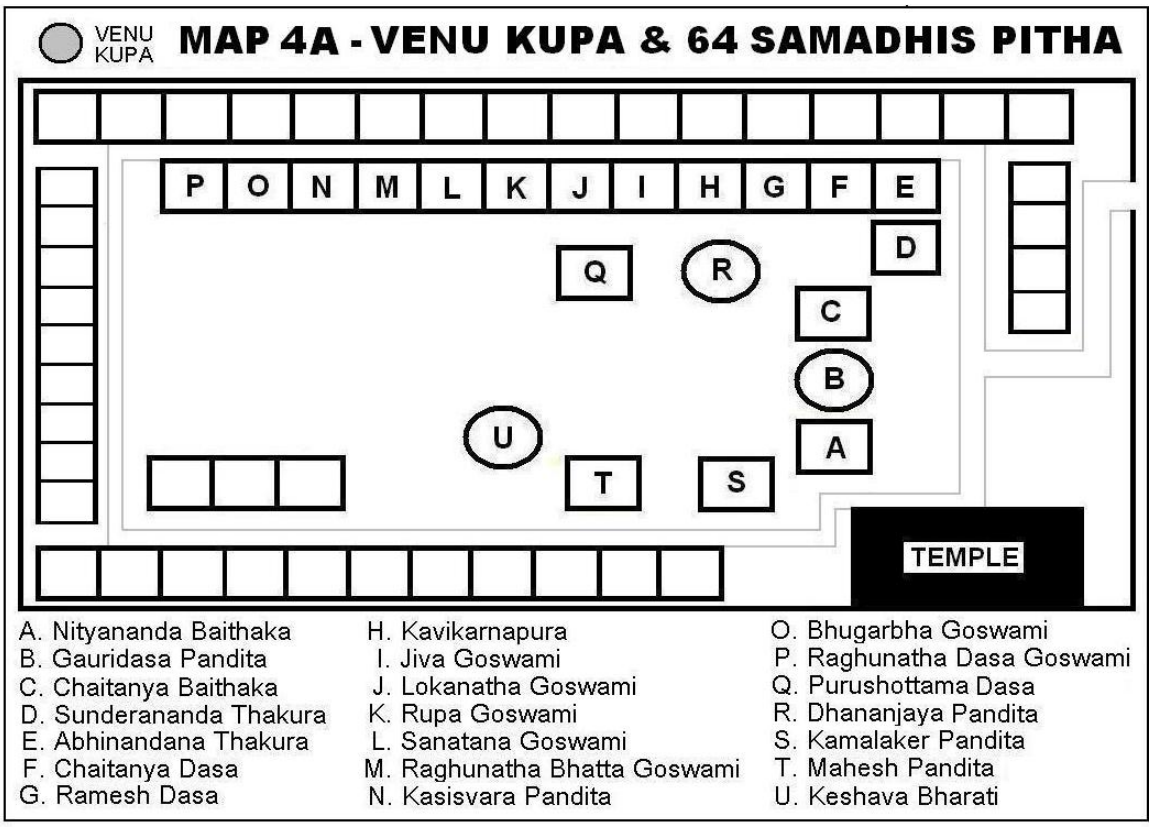
The Govindaji Mandira was built with three turrets and there were two smaller turrets on either side of the central *shikara* that were at least four or five stories high. The ground floor contains a number of large and small halls where discourses could be held, or where pilgrims could sit and relax as they do today. The second and third floors were meant as viewing galleries and a place where ladies could have *darshana* of the deity and enjoy the *kirtanas*, without having to mingle with the public on the ground floor, where large crowds of men would have normally congregated, and where the *kirtana* which was exclusively performed by men, would be taking place. Situated on top of the seven story central *shikara* was a very large oil lamp which was lit in the evening and fueled with either ghee or oil.

This large oil lamp ultimately led to the destruction of the central *shikara* when it was spotted by Aurangzeb in far-away Agra, a distance of sixty kilometers south of Vrindavana. Late one evening in the year 1670, the Mughal Emperor, while standing on the ramparts of his fort at Agra, suddenly noticed a bright light in the far distance, and after being told it was the light from a Hindu temple in Vrindavana, he became infuriated that the *shikara* of any temple belonging to Hindu idolaters, could be higher than the minaret of a Muslim mosque, and ordered its immediate destruction. Hearing rumors of an impending attack on Vrindavana by the soldiers of Aurangzeb, the Hindu princes who had their spies at the Mughal court, sent word to the temple priests in Vrindavana about the impending attack and made arrangements to secretly smuggle all the deities out of Vrindavana and take Them to the safety of Rajasthana, which was still ruled by Hindu kings. It was decided to move all the deities because as soon as Aurangzeb's soldiers would have arrived in Vrindavana, their first target would have been the destruction of these deities. When the soldiers eventually arrived they found no deities.

Aurangzeb's actual order to his soldiers was to dismantle the *shikara* of the Govindaji Mandira. His soldiers did not actually dismantle any floors of the temple itself accept the easily ramovable decorative *chattris* and arches running around the roof-top of the *mandap*. The soldiers merely desecrated the temple interior by smashing all the intricate frescos and sculptures they could find, and also defiled the *garbha-griha* or deity room, which was sufficient under ancient temple laws for the temple to be abandoned. Aurangzeb's soldiers only dismantled the top four floors of the *shikara* and then stopped, as Aurangzeb's order had been fulfilled and the soldiers then left Vrindavana. This has also been confirmed by ancient accounts of the actual episode. The other temples that were desecrated by Aurangzeb's soldiers besides Govindaji were; Madana-mohana, Radha Gopinath, Jugala Kishore, and Radha Vallabha. Since the time of the desecration of Vrindavana's temples, the deities of the Goswamis have continued to be worshiped in Jaipur. The deity of Lord Govindaji is presently being worshiped in the grounds of the Jaipura royal palace.

V.30 **Venu Kupa / Sixty-four Samadhi Pitha**

In the *Vraja-riti-cintamani* it says. **"In the midst of the *rasa-dance* Radha and Krishna left the *gopis* company and enjoyed pastimes in a solitary place. When Radha became thirsty, Krishna created this well by playing on His flute."** There were many



pastimes where Krishna would suddenly disappear from the *gopis* taking only Radharani. On some occasions Krishna would also suddenly disappear leaving Radharani all alone, but due to the influence of *yogamaya*, neither Radharani nor the *gopis* would remember the previous events. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Krishna created this well to quench the thirst of the cowherd boys. The word *'venu'* means 'flute' and *'kupa'* means a 'well'. This well which has now completely disappeared was formerly located on the north-eastern side of the garden containing the Sixty-four Samadhi Pitha. This sacred *pitha* was established at the same time the Govindaji Mandira was built.

The Sixty-four Samadhi Pitha, which is a 'garden of remembrance' contains two *baithakas* (sitting places) belonging to Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda, which are *smriti-sthalas*. The word *smriti* means places of remembrance and They did not actually sit here. These two *baithakas* are surrounded by the *samadhis* of Lord Chaitanya's sixty-four principle followers, who are referred to as the 'Sixty-four Mahanta's', or leaders of Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* movement, and also includes all the Gaudiya Goswamis of Vrindavana. The word '*mahant*' generally refers to a temple founder or hereditary administrator. The majority of *samadhis* are *pushpa-samadhis, smriti-samadhis,* or *nama-samadhis*, and in some cases sacred articles like clothing, beads, or garlands belonging to those *mahanta's* are buried. Amongst the sixty-four *samadhis* are three full *samadhis* including the *vibhuti samadhi* of Shrila Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, and the full *samadhis* of Kasishwara Pandita and Subuddhi Raya.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.30a **Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami Samadhi**

This *samadhi* contains the ashes of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, who disappeared in the year 1579, while performing *bhajana* on the banks of Radha-kunda where his sacred body was cremated. It was decided to cremate his mortal remains to avoid in the future any

chance of desecration by Muslim fanatics. This was also done in the case of both Raghunatha Dasa Goswami and Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, who were also cremated at Radha-kunda. A portion of Radhunatha Bhatta Goswami's ashes were entombed at the Teen Goswami Samadhi Pitha at Radha-kunda and also at the Sixty-four Samadhi Pitha in Vrindavana. It is also said that Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami used to perform *bhajana* in this garden near to Venu Kupa.

Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami was born in the year 1505, as the son of Tapan Mishra, a close associate of Lord Chaitanya. When Lord Chaitanya went in His youth to East Bengal to teach Sanskrit grammar, he met Tapan Misra and advised him to live in Benares (Varanasi). Later when Lord Chaitanya was on His journey from Puri to Vrindavana, he stayed in Benares for a few days at the house of Tapan Mishra and also met another associate named Chandrasekhara. While on His return journey, He stayed in the house of Chandrasekhara and took *prashadam* at Tapan Misra's house. During these visits to Benares, whenever Lord Chaitanya took his meals at the house of Tapan Misra, his young son Raghunatha, who was at that time around ten years old, obtained the Lord's association and had the opportunity to massage the Lord's lotus feet while He rested after His meal. When Lord Chaitanya left for Puri, Raghunatha was so attached to the service of Lord Chaitanya that he wanted to go with the Lord to Puri, but the Lord forbade him to do so as he was still very young.

After completing his studies, Raghunatha finally left for Puri to meet Lord Chaitanya who was extremely happy to see him and kept him at Puri for about eight months. Raghunatha was a very expert cook and would sometimes prepare meals for Lord Chaitanya. As Tapan Mishra was very old at that time, Lord Chaitanya sent Raghunatha back to Benares to care for his aged parents who were pure Vaishnavas, and also advised him that he should remain as a life-long *brahmachari*. After the demise of his parents, Raghunatha returned to Puri staying there in the association of Lord Chaitanya for another eight months, before the Lord ordered him to join Rupa and Sanatana in Vrindavana to assist them in excavating the lost holy places of Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes and propagating the *sankirtana* movement.

On arrival in Vrindavana, Rupa and Sanatana were very happy to see Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, and immediately accepted him as their younger god-brother. Raghunatha Bhatta exhibited all the good qualities of a pure Vaishnava and was of very humble demeanor. During the course of his life, he would never hear criticism of others, saying that as they are engaged in Krishna's service, he did not mind their faults. He gained great notoriety for his recitation of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, and his chanting of the *slokas* from the *Bhagavatam* was especially wonderful to hear. His voice was as sweet and melodious as a cuckoo and all those who heard him chanting the sacred *slokas* became enraptured. He would always recite the *Bhagavatam* before Rupa and Sanatana and the assembled Goswamis, singing each *sloka* three or four times over, each time in different meter and *raga* (tune). During such recitations he would often manifest ecstatic symptoms and his body would shake and his eyes would fill with tears. His hair would also stand on end his voice would begin to falter, on some occasions he would also swoon. The original *Bhagavatam* used by Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami has been preserved and can be seen at the Bhattaji Mandira in Vrindavana. He was the spiritual master of Raja Man Singh, the king of Jaipura, and after Emperor Akbar granted permission for the construction of the Goswami temples in Vrindavana, Raghunatha Bhatta asked Raja Man Singh to take charge and supervise the construction work. According to the *Gaura-ganoddesha-dipika*, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami was Raga-manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.31 **Pani Ghata**

This is the *ghata* where the *gopis* crossed the Yamuna without a boat. The story is related in the *Gopala-tapani-upanishad*. Once on Krishna's advice, the *gopis* where going to Panigaon village to serve a feast to the great sage Durvasa Muni so that he could break his *ekadashi* fast. Durvasa Muni whose *ashrama* was near Mathura was staying in the vicinity of Panigoan. As it so happened there were no boats in those days going to Panigaon village on

the far shore of the Yamuna and therefore Radharani asked Krishna how they would be able to cross the Yamuna, Krishna then told how they could cross. When the *gopis* reached the riverbank, remembering what Krishna's had told said, Radharani prayed to Yamunaji and then said, "Krishna the *brahmachari*". As soon as Yamunaji heard the words spoken by Radha, at that very moment the current of the river subsided revealing a shallow path to the other side. The *gopis* then crossed the Yamuna and were able to serve Durvasa Muni with a wonderful feast. Being pleased with the *gopis*, Durvasa gave his heartfelt blessings to all of them. Radharani received a special blessing from the sage, that whatever She cooked would always taste like nectar, and whoever ate Her cooking would never become sick and would also live a long life.

The meaning of Radha's words that 'Krishna is a pure *brahmachari*' is that Krishna has a spiritual body and is transcendental to the platform of material lust, and therefore His loving relationship with Radharani and the *gopis* is based upon pure spiritual emotion or *bhava* and not for satisfaction of the material sense which lead only to suffering.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.32 **Adi Bhadri Ghata**

It is said that Krishna showed His form of Lord Badri-Narayana at this *ghata* just to please the *gopis*, others say that He also showed this same form to the cowherd boys. Some have said that Shrila Vyasadeva, who took birth near Mathura, wrote the tenth canto of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* here.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.33 **Raja Ghata**

This is said to be the place where Krishna disguised Himself as a boatman, in order to take the *gopis* across the Yamuna River in His boat. Krishna covered Himself with a large cloak so that the *gopis* could not recognize Him. On that day, the *gopis* were on their way to sell milk products in a market on the other side of the Yamuna, but when the *gopis* arrived on the river-bank, they found there was only one boat owned by a very strange looking boatman dressed in a large cloak. This boatman agreed to take the *gopis* in his boat, but insisted that before they could ride in His boat, He would first have to bathe the feet of at least one *gopi*, only then could the *gopis* ride on his boat. At first the *gopis* objected to this proposal, but seeing no other boat in sight, they agreed to the boatman's unusual request, asking which particular *gopi's* feet the boatman wanted to bathe. The boatman, after some discussion with his boat, chose Radharani, and then very elaborately bathed Radharani's feet with great pomp and ceremony. The boatman then sprinkled the bathing water over his head, and then over his boat, and then over the Yamuna. The *gopis* were then able to board the boat and the boatman started rowing towards the other shore.

In the middle of the river the boatman suddenly stopped rowing, complaining of weakness due to lack of food, and suggested that the *gopis* should feed him with some of their milk products in order for him to regain his strength. At first the *gopis* refused and threatened to report his behavior to King Kamsa, the powerful ruler of Mathura, but seeing no alternative, they ultimately agreed, and fed the boatman with some milk sweets, butter, and yogurt. After enjoying the milk products, the boatman again began rowing, but due to being completely bloated with milk products, soon slumped over and lay motionless on the floor of the boat. Radharani asked one of the *gopis* to see what was wrong with the boatman. Lifting the boatman's cloak to see what the problem was, she suddenly burst out laughing while pulling Krishna's flute from under His waistband. Having discovered the boatman's true identity, all the *gopis* began laughing and clapping their hands. The *gopis* then rowed the boat themselves to the other shore.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.34 **Mahaprabhu Baithaka / Vishrama Sthali**

This is the place where Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would sit and rest while walking at noon from Imli Tala to His camp at Akrura Ghata. The word *'baithaka'* means 'sitting

place'. Some refer to this place as Vishrama-sthala or the resting place, which may also be applicable, but this is where Lord Chaitanya actually sat down on his way to Akrura Ghata, which is the actual Vishrama-sthala of Mahaprabhu. There is a temple here containing the deities of Lord Jagannatha that were once worshiped by Murari Gupta, who was a close associate of Lord Chaitanya. It is said that many years ago, the old residence of Murari Gupta in Bengal was being renovated when two sets of deities were discovered buried in the ground. According to an inscription found at the site, the deities of Lord Jagannatha and Gaura-Nitai had previously been worshiped by Murari Gupta and both sets of deities were then sent to Vrindavana to be worshiped. The deities of Lord Jagannatha are being worshiped here at the Chaitanya Baithaka and the deity of Gaura-Nitai can be seen at the Pishima Gaura-Natai Mandira in Loi Bazar. This place is now managed by the Gaudiya Matha and unfortunately the once beautiful compound where the *baithaka* of Mahaprabhu was located beneath a large banyana tree, has now been spoiled due to the recent construction of what appears to be a mundane looking guest-house.

How To Get There: (see map no. 4)

V.35 **Davanala-kunda**

This was the last place visited by Raghava Pandita, Shrinivasa Acharya, and Narottama Dasa during their *parikrama* of Vrindavana, which also brought to an end their *parikrama* around Vraja. From this place they went to Radha Damodara to meet Jiva Goswami and tell him about all the wonderful places they had visited during the course of their Vraja Mandala Parikrama.

This is the celebrated *kunda* where Krishna extinguished a blazing forest fire. The word *'davanala'* means a 'devastating forest fire'. After Krishna had subdued the poisonous Kaliya serpent, because it was already late in the day and darkness was slowly descending, the *Vrajavasis* decided to spend the night camped out not far from the bank of the Yamuna. During the night, everyone was suddenly awakened by a tumultuous roaring noise that sounded like a large herd of elephants were rampaging through the forest. Suddenly everyone noticed the deadly flames of an enormous forest fire that was rapidly moving towards them. The *Vrajavasis* thought that their lives were now coming to an end and they all looked toward their beloved Krishna to save them. Krishna was not happy to see the great distress the forest fire was causing to the *Vrajavasis* and not wasting another moment, Krishna immediately opened his mouth and swallowed-up the forest fire in a moment and the *Vrajavasis* were saved. The *Vrajavasis* were feeling great relief that Krishna had saved them, and as dawn was already fast approaching by then, they decided it was a good time to leave and everyone happily made their way back to their homes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 5)

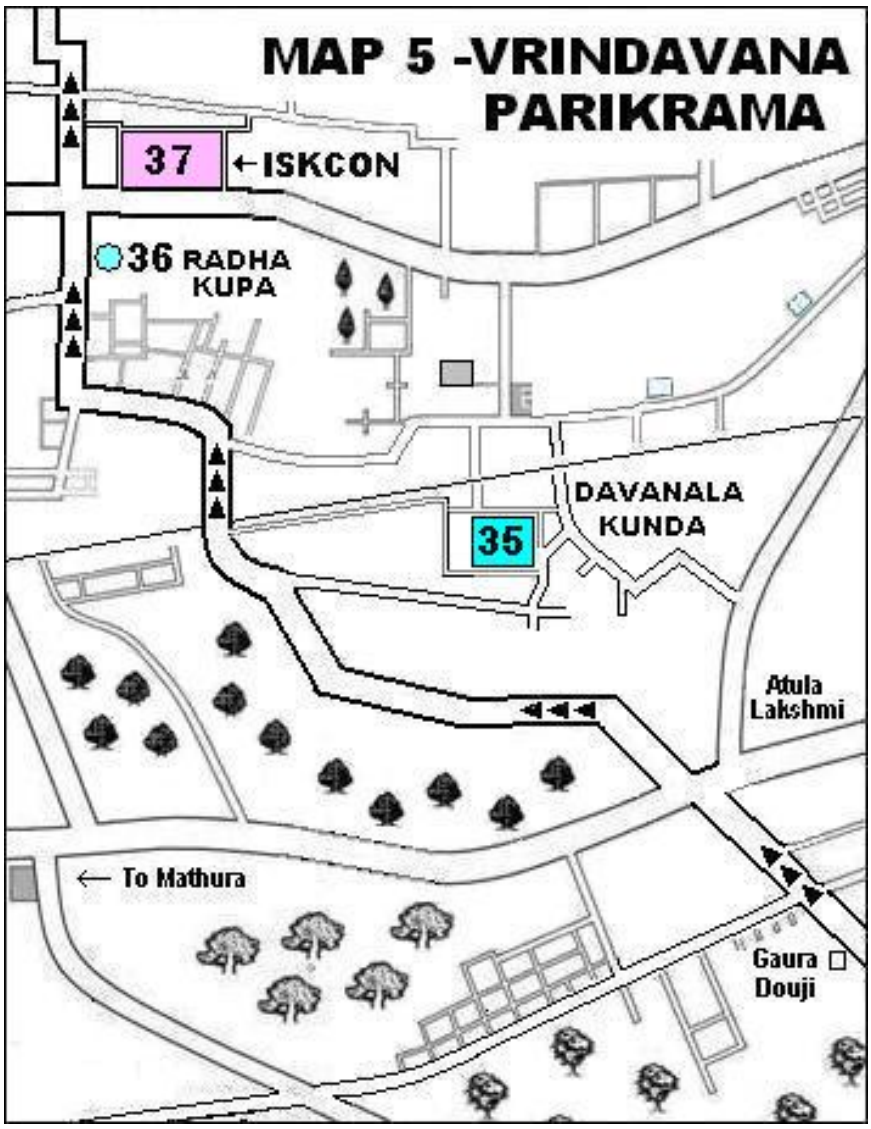
V.36 **Radha Kupa**

This ancient well known as Radha Kupa or Radha's well, is situated on the Vrindavana *parikrama* path as it passes through the sub-forest of Viharavana. The well is believed to have been used by Radharani and the *gopis* for obtaining drinking water whenever they came to this small forest of Viharavana to enjoy transcendental pastimes with Krishna. The word *'vihara'* means 'ambrosial pastimes' and there are a number of temples in Ramana Reti dedicated to the pastimes enacted in Viharavana, which was one of the twelve *upavanas* of Vrindavana and formerly covered the area around Ramana Reti. Unfortunately, this forest no longer exists. The Krishna Balarama Mandira is located on the border of Viharavana where it meets Ramana Reti.

How To Get There: (see map no. 5)

V.37 **Krishna Balarama Mandira (Iskcon)**

This temple was established in the year 1975, by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the illustrious founder-*acharya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon). The temple was meant primarily for the benefit of Shrila Prabhupada's thousands of disciples around the world, who when visiting



Vrindavana on pilgrimage, would have their own temple in the holy Dhama where they could stay and take advantage of the unique spiritual atmosphere of Lord Krishna's sacred abode. The Krishna Balarama Mandira now attracts more visitors than any other temple in Vrindavana and is famous throughout India for the exceedingly high standards of deity worship practiced here in strict accordance with the *pancharatrika* Vedic rites. The temple is also well known for its pristine cleanliness and very peaceful atmosphere as well as the *kirtans* and *bhajans* performed by the Western devotees, which is much appreciated by all those who visit the temple.

One of the most important *acharyas* in the history of Indian religion, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, became the first ever 'world teacher' of Indias Vedic religion and he single-handedly spread the message of Lord Chaitanya and the chanting of Krishna's holy names to every town and village on the face of the earth. By his efforts 'Hare Krishna' became a regular household word and he himself became world-famous as the founder of the 'Hare Krishna Movement'. Even though advanced in age, he circled the globe over fourteen times on lecture tours and initiated thousands of disciples into Krishna consciousness and the practice of *bhakti*-yoga. In his own lifetime, he established over one hundred temples of Radha and Krishna in almost every major city of the world. He is

credited with having ushered in a spiritual revolution that not only changed the lives of millions around the world, but is still continuing to change the lives of millions more, through his innumerable translations and commentaries on the ancient Vedic scriptures that explain the science of devotional service to Lord Krishna.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was the most recent in an unbroken line of Vaishnava *acharyas* or empowered spiritual masters, stretching back thousands of years that include such great personalities like the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Shripada Madhavacharya, Sukadeva Goswami, Veda-Vyasadeva, and Narada Muni. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was the foremost disciple of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami, who, as the previous *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaisnava *sampradaya*, gave Shrila Prabhupada the order to take the message of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to the Western world, in order to give those living outside India the chance to experience the sublime process of Krishna consciousness. Shrila Prabhupada was a highly renowned Vaishnava scholar and his translations of the Vedic classics earned him praise from scholars, theologians, academicians, and religious leaders the world over. His translations of the Vedas are presently used as standard texts in numerous colleges and universities world-wide. His unique translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* became the best-selling edition in the world, and his books have been translated into more than seventy of the world's major languages. With millions of copies of his books having been printed to date, Shrila Prabhupada is now recognized as the most prolific author of Vedic religion, culture, and philosophy that has ever lived.

In the holy month of *Karttik in* the year 1977, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada entered into *maha-samadhi* at the Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana and His sacred body was entombed in a very beautiful white marble Samadhi Mandira built by his disciples next to the temple.

How To Get There: (see map no. 5)

END OF VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA

BM.2 BHOJANA STHALA / YAJNA STHALA

This is the holy place (*sthala*) where Krishna and His cowherd boyfriends enjoyed a great feast (*bhojana*) provided by the wives of the *yajnic brahmanas*. There is a famous temple here known as Batrol-bihari Mandira situated on top of a small hill known as Bhojana Tila, which is the exact spot where Krishna and Balarama sat with Their friends to enjoy the wonderful feast (*bhojana)* on top of the hill (*tila*) provided by the *yajna-patnis*, the pious wives of the sacrificial *brahmanas*. The word *'bhatrola'* means 'cooked rice' or 'rice cooked with vegetables'. The exact location of the *yajna-sthala* where the *brahmanas* performed their *yajna* is not known, but it is believed to have been in the nearby village of Akrura, which in those days was inhabited by *brahmana* families belonging to the *gotra* of Angira Muni.

One day, Krishna and Balarama, along with Their cowherd boys were grazing Their cows near the banks of the Yamuna when some of the boys informed Krishna that due to not having taken any breakfast, they were feeling very hungry. Krishna decided to send a few cowherd boys to beg food in the nearby village, where a group of local *brahmanas* were performing an opulent and lavish Vedic fire sacrifice (*yajna*). Krishna warned His friends that these *yajnic brahmanas* were not Vaishnavas, but impersonal followers of the *shruti-shastras* known as *smarta brahmanas*, who were averse to chanting the holy names of God.

When the cowherd boys reached the *yajna-sthala*, they approached the *yajnic brahmanas* to ask for food on behalf of Krishna and Balarama, but their request was rejected by the *brahmanas*, who told the boys not to disturb them as they were very busy in performing Vedic sacrifices. When Krishna was informed about this, He advised the cowherd boys to instead approach the *yajna-patnis*, the wives of the *yajnic brahmanas*. When the boys approached the wives of the *brahmanas*, the cowherd boys informed them that Krishna and Balarama were nearby and were feeling very hungry and wanted some food. As soon as the *yajna-patnis* heard the request of the cowherd boys, they became completely overjoyed and

immediately gathered various food preparations to feed Krishna and Balarama that were meant to be offered in the sacrifice.

Although they were forbidden to go to Krishna and Balarama, the *yajna-patnis* ignored their husbands, considering the chance to see Krishna and Balarama and serve Them directly as the opportunity of a lifetime. After collecting a wonderful variety of preparations, the *yajna-patnis* proceeded to the place where Krishna and Balarama were waiting. Arriving there, they saw the great transcendental beauty of Krishna and felt deep satisfaction within their hearts. Krishna was also very happy to see the *jajna-patnis* and appreciated how much trouble they had taken to serve Him. Then Krishna and Balarama sat down with their friends while the *yajna-patnis* served them with a wonderful feast.

How To Get There: This place is 3km south of Vrindavana and 500mt north of Akrura Ghata (see map no. 1)

BM.3 **AKRURA GHATA**

Akrura Ghata is named after Krishna's great devotee Akrura Mahasaya and is considered one of the most important riverside *ghatas* in Vrindavana Dhama. Although the channel of the Yamuna River has now moved more than one kilometer away from here, one can still visit the ancient Akrura Krishna-Balarama Mandira that is situated where the old *ghata* used to be. In this temple one can see the deity of Akrura standing in the centre with Krishna and Balarama standing on either side of him. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says**. "O Srinivasa, see the best of all holy places Shri Akrura-tirtha. This well known place is very dear to Krishna. By taking bath here on *purnima*, especially during *Karttik*, one is liberated from this material world. Whatever result one can achieve by bathing in all the holy places can be attained by taking bath here. Whoever takes bath at this place on the day of the solar eclipse gets the benefit of performing a *rajasuya* or *ashvamedha-yajna*. These statements are confirmed in the *Saura* and *Adi-varaha Puranas*."** In the *Saura Purana* it says. **"Among the residences of Lord Ananta, the holy place called Akrura-tirtha is topmost. It destroys all one's sinful reactions and is extremely dear to Shri Hari."**

How To Get There: This place is This place is 3.5km south of Vrindavana and 500mt south of Bhojana Sthala (see map no. 1)

The Vrajavasis Vision of Vaikuntha

In ancient times this celebrated *ghata* was also known as 'Brahma-hrada', meaning 'Lake of Brahma', because the entire spiritual sky, also known as the Brahma-loka (spiritual planets), was shown to Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men at this *ghata*. In this regard, the word '*brahma'* refers to the 'spiritual creation' where the Vaikuntha planets eternally exist. Akrura also had the vision of the Vaikuntha planet of Lord Seshashayi Vishnu at Brahma-hrada.

After Nanda Maharaja had been rescued from the clutches of Varuna by Krishna, both Nanda and the cowherd men were astonished at Krishna's power and influence. The cowherd men were speculating as to why Varuna had so reverentially worshiped Krishna, and were thinking that perhaps Krishna was the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Whereas Nanda Maharaja never considered that his beloved son was the Supreme Lord, and thought that the demigod Varuna had worshiped Krishna because He was such a wonderful child. The cowherd men were also speculating whether or not they would ever be liberated and what would be their destination at the time of death. Understanding the minds of the cowherd men and wishing to show them their future destination, Krishna brought Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men to the bank of the Yamuna at Akrura Ghata, and when they all entered the water to bathe, they immediately received the vision of the transcendental Vaikuntha planets including Goloka Vrindavana.

Akrura's Vision of Vaikuntha at Akrura Ghata

While Akrura was taking Krishna and Balarama to Mathura on his chariot, when they eventually arrived at the banks of the Yamuna, Akrura stopped the chariot so they could take a midday bath and refresh themselves during the long ride from Nandagrama to Mathura.

Krishna and Balarama first took Their bath in the Yamuna and then sat on the chariot while Akrura went to take his bath. While bathing in the river, Akrura suddenly saw within the crystal clear water both Krishna and Balarama. Akrura was completely astonished, as he was sure Krishna and Balarama were presently sitting on the chariot. Coming out of the water, Akrura went to check on Krishna and Balarama and as he thought, They were still sitting on the chariot. Somewhat bewildered, Akrura immediately returned to the river to confirm who it was he had seen within the water. Entering the river he again saw Krishna and Balarama, but this time Krishna assumed the form of Vishnu with four arms and was sitting on the lap of Balarama, who had assumed the form of Sesha Naga the celestial serpent who possessed thousands of hoods. They were surrounded by the host of demigods including; Brahma, Shiva, the Charanas, Siddha*s*, and Gandharvas. Akrura also saw the four Kumaras, Narada Muni, and Prahlada Maharaja, and also the Lord's personal associates, Nanda and Sunanda.

Overcome by the divine vision within the Yamuna, Akrura bowed his head and began offering prayers of glorification to Krishna and Balarama. Just as Akrura finished his prayers, the vision of Vaikuntha suddenly disappeared. Coming out of the river, Akrura returned to the chariot where Krishna and Balarama were sitting. Krishna asked Akrura if he had seen something wonderful either in the water or in space. Akrura replied that when he had seen with his own eyes, Their Lordships Krishna and Balarama, what other wonderful thing in the creation was there to be seen. Akrura then mounted the chariot and headed towards Mathura.

Krishna's Final Pastime of His Vraja-lila

This famous *ghata* on the banks of Yamuna was the last place where Krishna and Balarama performed Their pastimes before leaving Vraja-Vrindavana for Mathura, where They were destined to kill King Kamsa and release Their parents Vasudeva and Devaki from Kamsa's prison cell. After arriving at Akrura Ghata, Krishna and Balarama entered the river to take their bath and through the agency of the internal potency *yogamaya*, They changed Their forms, emerging from the water as Vasudeva and Sankarshana, and then proceeded to Mathura in their two armed Vishnu forms. Therefore, Krishna and Balarama never actually left Vraja-Vrindavana, but remain there unseen, hidden within the hearts and minds of the *gopis* and *gopas* of Vraja. This fact has been confirmed by Uddhava and others. This aspect of Krishna remaining present in Vrindavana but unseen is called His *aprakata-lila*, or un-manifested pastimes, whereas the *prakata-lila* is the manifested or visible pastimes. In the *Chaitanya-charitamrta,* Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu told Rupa Goswami. **"The Krishna known as Yadukumara is Vasudeva Krishna. He is different from the Krishna who is the son of Nanda Maharaja. Yadukumara Krishna manifests his pastimes in the cities of Mathura and Dwaraka, but Krishna, the son of Nanda Maharaja never leaves Vrindavana."**

Another truth is that Mathura is an aspect of Vaikuntha, while Vraja-Vrindavana is within the realm of Goloka, even though they exist within the same spiritual planet of Goloka Vrindavana. Therefore, when Krishna appeared in the prison cell of Kamsa, He appeared before Vasudeva and Devaki in His four armed form complete with all the symbols of Vishnu. This form was then converted by Krishna into His two armed Vishnu form also known as Krishna, and by other names like Mathureshwara, or Dwarkadisha. It has been established by Shrila Jiva Goswami that Krishna, in His original two armed form as Govinda, also simultaneously appeared in Gokula from the womb of Yashoda Mayi along with His sister Ekanamsa (Yogamaya Devi), but by the power of the internal potency, He temporarily remained unseen. Krishna, in His original two armed form known as Govinda, Gopala, or Gopijanabalabha, does not appear in Mathura, but appears only in Gokula, which is also known as Vraja as well as Vrindavana.

When Vasudeva took Krishna from Mathura to Gokula and exchanged Him for Yogamaya Devi, it was by the internal potency of *yogamaya*, that the Vishnu form merged with the original form of Krishna, Ekanamsa (Yogamaya Devi) was then taken to Mathura by Vasudeva. Some years later, Anirudha's grandson Maharaja Vajranabha, established the deity of Lord Keshavadeva, a four-armed Vishnu-*murti* form in Mathura, because Mathura is

considered a localized sphere of Vaikuntha within the spiritual planet of Goloka. Dwaraka is in the same category as Mathura, where Krishna performs pastimes in His two armed Vishnu-*murti* form. Vraja-Vrindavana or Gokula-Vrindavana is where Krishna lives eternally as a cowherd boy, whereas in Mathura and Dwaraka, He lives as a royal prince of the Yadu Dynasty.

Lord Chaitanya Visits Akrura Ghata

After completing the *parikrama* around the sacred forests of Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu eagerly arrived in the forest of Vrindavana. In order to avoid the crowds, He stayed at Akrura Ghata which was an isolated spot where the Lord would not be disturbed by large crowds, as had previously happened in Mathura. After completing the *parikrama* of Vraja, Lord Chaitanya wanted to spend as much time as possible in the forest of Vrindavana and specifically at Seva-kunja where the famed Imli Tala was located. It can also be understood that Vrindavana, and specifically Seva Kunja, is more important to Lord Chaitanya than any other place in Vraja, including Radha-kunda, and He was yearning to reach S*eva-kunja* so that He could engage in *bhajana* and chant the holy names of Krishna in complete solitude. Although the pastimes at Radha-kunda are of the highest transcendental flavor, it is a place where the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna meet together (*sambhanda*), and enjoy each other's company. But in the pastimes at Seva-kunja in Vrindavana, besides meeting and enjoying and enjoying each other's company, there is also the unique aspect of separation (*vipralambha*), which brings about an even greater transcendental ecstasy and unique flavor to the pastimes of Radha and Krishna. In this regard, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has taught that love in separation (*vipralambha*), is vastly superior to all other *rasas* and manifests the highest degree of ecstatic love experienced by both Radha and Krishna, and forms the pinnacle of Their Vrindavana pastimes. Similarly, for the devotees of Radha and Krishna, loving service in separation from Their Lordships, is the highest form of devotional service or *prema-bhakti* that a *sadhaka* can possibly achieve.

Every morning Lord Chaitanya would walk to *Seva-kunja* and sit near the banks of the Yamuna at Imli Tala and chant on His beads. At that time there were no residences there and the whole area bordered by the Yamuna was an uninhabited forest where the *rasa-lila* and other pastimes had taken place. As some of Krishna's pastime places were still known because of Vedic scriptures like the Adi-varaha *Purana*, Vaishnavas pilgrims and local *Vrajavasis* and would sometimes visit the holy places along the banks of the Yamuna like Kaliya Ghata, Chehana Ghata, Keshi Ghat, Dhira Samira, and Vamsi Vata. Lord Chaitanya's favorite spot was Imli Tala, where He would sit for hours beneath the ancient tamarind tree by the bank of the Yamuna where He became absorbed in the mood of Radha-*bhava*, while experiencing Radha's intense feelings of separation from Krishna, as He chanted the holy names on His beads.

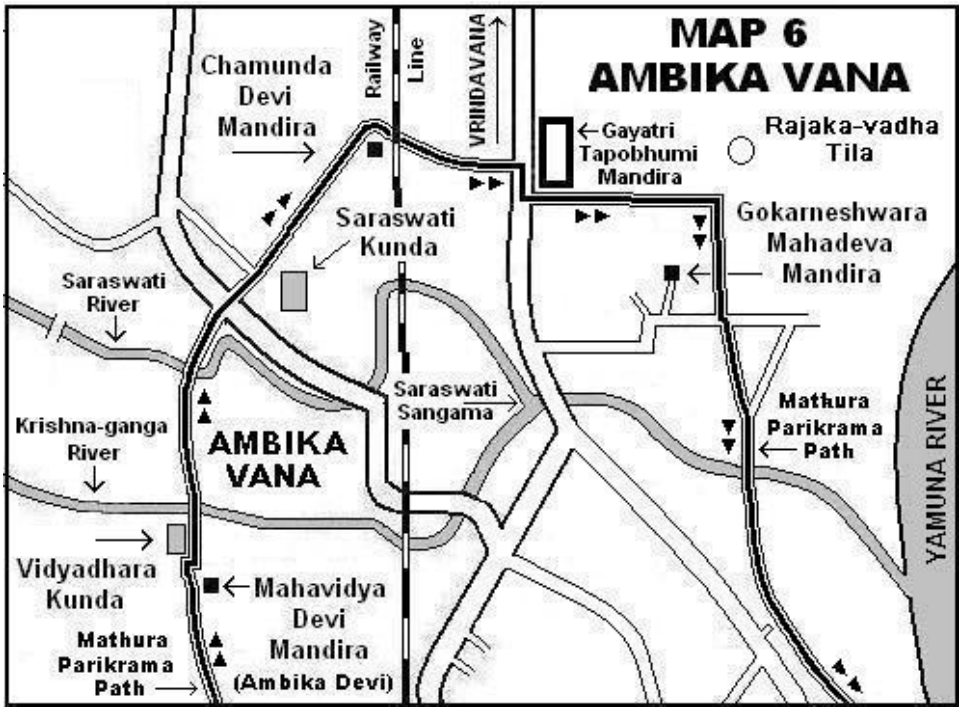
After spending the morning hours chanting *japa* in Vrindavana, Lord Chaitanya would return to Akrura Ghata, and after bathing, He would take lunch prepared by his assistant Balabhadra Bhattacharya. In the afternoon Lord Chaitanya remained at Akrura Ghata where He chanted on His beads and met with the occasional visitor who came to see Him from Mathura or elsewhere. Many *brahmanas* would come to Akrura Ghata in order to prepare meals for the Lord Chaitanya, and after cooking various preparations and offering it to their *shaligrama-shilas*, they would very happily feed the Lord with the *maha-prashadam*. One day while sitting on the river bank, Lord Chaitanya began contemplating the vision of Vaikuntha as seen by Akrura and the *Vrajavasis* led by Nanda Maharaja at this same spot. Suddenly being overcome with ecstasy, Lord Chaitanya jumped deep into the Yamuna and remained submerged for a long time. Seeing this, a devotee named Krishna Dasa, immediately shouted to Balabhadra that the Lord was drowning, and with great effort they managed to pull Lord Chaitanya from the water in an almost unconscious state. After this incident, Balabhadra saw that the Lord was now beginning to experience an almost uncontrollable ecstasy due to the powerful effects of *maha-bhava*, and fearing any further incidents, Balabhadra decided to take Lord Chaitanya away from Vrindavana and start the return journey to Puri.

BM.4 **AMBIKA-KANANA / GOKARNESHWARA**

The *Shrimad Bhagavatama* says that one day, Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men decided to witness the annual *Shiva-ratri* festival being held at Ambikavana. Although there is a famous shrine of Ambika Devi is in the state of Gujarat, the original Adi-Ambika Devi Mandira and Ambikavana is here in Vraja. Historical records show that this Ambikavana or Ambika-kanana as it is also known, is near Mathura on the road to Vrindavana, where two small rivers known as the Saraswati and the Krishna-ganga, join each other at a place called the Sarasvati Sangama and then flow into the Yamuna. During the period of British rule these two sacred rivers were converted into drainage channels or *nalas* and today form part of the overflow system for the Delhi-Agra canal that was constructed for the purpose of irrigation. Situated near the Saraswati Sangama just behind the Mathura All India Radio Station, is the Gokarneshwara Mahadeva Mandira. Ambika-kanana is about one kilometer along the Mathura *parikrama* path going in the reverse direction, where one can also see the Saraswati-kunda, and the Ambika Devi Mandira, presently known as the Mahavidya Devi Mandira. Just to the north of Gokarneshwara Mahadeva Mandira is Rajaka-vadha Tila where Krishna killed the envious washerman who washed King Kamsa's clothes.

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that after seeing Gokarneshwara Mahadeva and Ambikadevi, Shrinivasa and Narottama became filled with ecstasy; Raghava Pandita then informed them that it was here at Ambika-kanana where Nanda Maharaja was swallowed by a huge python. Lord Chaitanya also visited these same holy places while in the company of the *sanodiya brahmana* named Krishna Dasa, during His *parikrama* around Mathura.

How To Get There: (see map no. 6)



Gokarneshwara Mahadeva

This is where Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men of Vraja came to see the annual *Shiva-ratri* celebrations. This festival marks the waking-up of Lord Shiva who is said to have been meditating for many months deep within the snow on the summit of mount Kailash which lies in Tibet. This ancient country lying north of the Himalayas where Mount Kailash is

situated, was formerly ruled by the demigod Kuvera, the king of the Yakshas, and it is said that modern day Tibetans are the descendents of the Yakshas.

Situated near a small hill called Kailash Tila is the ancient temple of Lord Shiva known as the Gokarneshwara Mahadeva Mandira. From the top of the *tila* or hill, there is a wonderful view of the River Yamuna. The *Adi-varaha Purana* says that anyone who has *darshana* of Gokarneshwara will be freed from all sins. This deity is one of the four *ksetra-palas* or protectors of Mathura city and guards the northern region. *'ksetra'* means the 'area' and *'pala'* means 'protector'. Situated within the temple compound is said to be the *samadhi* of the great sage Gautama Rishi.

In the temple can be seen the deity of the celebrated sage Gokarna Rishi, who was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, and thus the Shiva-*linga* is called Gokarneshwara, meaning that Shiva is the most worshipful deity of the sage Gokarna. It is said that this place was the *tapa-bhumi* of the sage Gokarna who came here from Karnataka in South India to perform penance on the banks of the Yamuna. The place where he had been engaged in severe penance near the sea coast in Karnataka became known as Dakshina Gokarna, or the southern Gokarna and this place near Mathura became known as Uttar Gokarna, or the northern Gokarna.

In the *Padma Purana*, the story of the sage Gokarna has been described. His father, who was childless, approached a *rishi* to ask for a boon to get a son. The *rishi* gave a sacrificial fruit that was to be eaten by the wife in order to become pregnant. Unfortunately, a hungry cow managed to eat the fruit before it could be given to the wife and within a short time the cow gave birth to baby boy. Although the baby was quite normal, its ears were like those of a cow, thus the baby became known as 'Gokarna', which means 'cow-ears'. When he grew up he became a renowned sage and was famous as a great exponent of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. His faith in the *Bhagavatam* was so great that even though his brother was a sinful rascal and became a ghost in his next life, Gokarna was able to deliver him from the body of a ghost, simply by his daily recitation of the *Bhagavatam*.

How To Get There: Gokarneshwara is situated behind the All India Radio station at Masani on the Mathura-Vrindavana road (see map no. 6)

Saraswati-kunda / Saraswati Mandira

This sacred *kunda* situated within the forest of Ambikavana is situated on the Mathura *parikrama* path between Gokarneshwara Mahadeva and the Mahavidya Devi Mandira (Ambika Devi). Formerly within this *kunda* there was a natural underground spring that was said to be the River Saraswati and was the source of a small river known as the Saraswarti that flowed into the Yamuna. Another small river nearby was called the Krishna-ganga and they both met at the place still known as the Saraswati Sangama. Many pilgrims used to take a sacred bath in these rivers in olden days. There is a very rare shrine here dedicated to Bhagawati Saraswati, the goddess of learning, who in her divine aspect as Bhagawati is considered to be a consort of Lord Vishnu. The natural spring within the *kunda* dried up many years ago and the forest of Ambikavana has also disappeared. Lord Chaitanya also visited this *kunda* during His *parikrama* of Mathura.

How To Get There: Saraswati-Kunda is situated on the Mathura *parikrama* path 1 km to the west of Gokarneshwara. (see map no. 6)

Ambika Devi Mandira (Mahavidya Devi)

This is the shrine of Ambika Devi which is presently known as the Mahavidya Devi Mandira, where Nanda Maharaja came after visiting Gokarneshwara Mahadeva. The temple is situated within the forest of Ambikavana and nearby is a *kunda* known as Sudarshana Moksha-kunda (Mahavidya-kunda), where the Vidyadhara named Sudarshana was given liberation from the body of a serpent by Krishna. Ambika Devi is another name of Parvati, the eternal consort and wife of Lord Siva. According to some, this deity was also worshiped by the Pandavas during the period of their exile. Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu also had *darshana* of this temple when He visited Krishna's pastime places in Mathura.

The name Mahavidya Devi generally refers to Durga, as the possessor of great knowledge (*mahavidya*). There are ten different forms of Mahavidya Devi that are specifically worshiped in the tantric system of *sadhanas* by the followers of the Shakta-*sampradaya*. The tantric worship of Mahavidya became very popular around the 7TH Century onwards, although worship of the mother goddess has been discovered in Paleolithic settlements in India dating back 22,000 years. The ten forms of Mahavidya Devi are said to represent the feminine aspect, or *shakti* of the Supreme Lord, and are considered in tantric worship to be the equivalent of the ten avatars of Vishnu, and Devi is envisioned to be the impersonal Supreme Brahman, the absolute controlling factor and cause of all causes. In Vaishnavism, all the forms of Devi, including Ambika, Parvati, Mahavidya, Katyayani, and Durga, are expansions of Yogamaya Devi, Lord Krishna's sister, and Vaishnavas worship her in order to achieve pure devotion to Krishna, just as the *gopis* did when they worshiped Katyayani Devi to achieve Krishna as their husband. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says, **"O Srinivasa, taking *darshana* of Krishna's relatives like Ekanamsa (Yogamaya Devi), Yashoda Mayi, Devaki Devi, and Mahavidya Devi, can save one from the sin of killing a *brahmana*."** Although some say this is one of the *sakti-pithas* it is not, the only *shakti-pitha* in Vraja is the Katyayani Mandira in Vrindavana.

How To Get There: Ambika Devi Mandira (Mahavidya) is situated on the Mathura *parikrama* path 1.5 km to the west of Gokarneshwara Mahadeva Mandira. (see map no. 6)

Nanda Maharaja Swallowed by a Serpent at Ambika-kanana

After Nanda and the cowherd men had seen the *Shiva-ratri* festival and worshiped the deity of Lord Shiva known as Gokarneshwara Mahadeva, they went to Ambikavana and after having *darshana* of the mother goddess Ambika, they lay down to rest for the night under a tree. During the night, a large black python arrived there and attempted to swallow Nanda Maharaja. Suddenly waking up to find that a huge python had already swallowing him up to his waist, out of great fear Nanda began spontaneously calling Krishna's name. Immediately arriving on the scene to save His father, Krishna touched the serpent with His lotus feet and immediately the serpent vanished and a demigod of the Vidyadhara planet appeared before Him with folded hands. The Vidyadhara, whose name was Sudarshana informed Krishna what had happened to him, "Because I had been proud of my incredible beauty, I had committed an offence against the great sage Angira Muni. One day while flying in my aerial vehicle, I saw Angira Muni and laughed and made some jokes about his ugliness. The sage then cursed me to become a snake, but by the mercy of Angira, I have now been blessed by the touch of Your lotus feet and my life has now become perfect." After explaining everything and offering his humble obeisance's to Krishna, Sudarshana returned to the heavenly planets.

Even today there are many large pythons living in the jungles near here. Recently, a fifteen-foot python was killed at Dorera village a few kilometers from this place and the old men of the village recount having seen thirty-foot long pythons near the banks of the Yamuna. They said that many, many years ago, huge pythons used to swallow the villager's cows, buffaloes, goats, and also small children. Reports still appear in newspapers about large pythons swallowing children in many parts of India. Once, while passing through a village in the area, an Iskcon devotee saw the funeral procession of the burned and battered carcass of a large python with a dead child stuck waist deep in its mouth. The villagers had tried everything to kill the serpent, but it refused to release the child which eventually died of fright, after killing the python, they were then forced to cremate the child while still stuck within the mouth of the serpent.

BM.5 MATHURA PURI (Mathura)

According to the *Puranas*, the ancient city of Mathura is situated within the sacred forest of Madhuvana. In the *Skanda Purana* it is said. **"Originally Mathura Puri was the forest of the demon Madhu who was slain by the almighty Shri Hari. O King, nothing is impossible within this Madhuvana of Shri Hari. I am not capable of naming all the holy**

places situated here." In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"In the forest of Madhuvana, Mathura Puri is gloriously situated."**

The city of Mathura is famous as the birthplace of Lord Shri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead who appeared here in the prison cell of Kamsa five thousand years ago. But long before this important event of Lord Krishna's birth, Mathura was already well known and considered to be the holiest city in India. It is said in the *Puranas*, that although it may be possible to count all the particles of dust on the face of the earth; it is not possible to count all the holy places in Mathura.

The Ancient History of Mathura

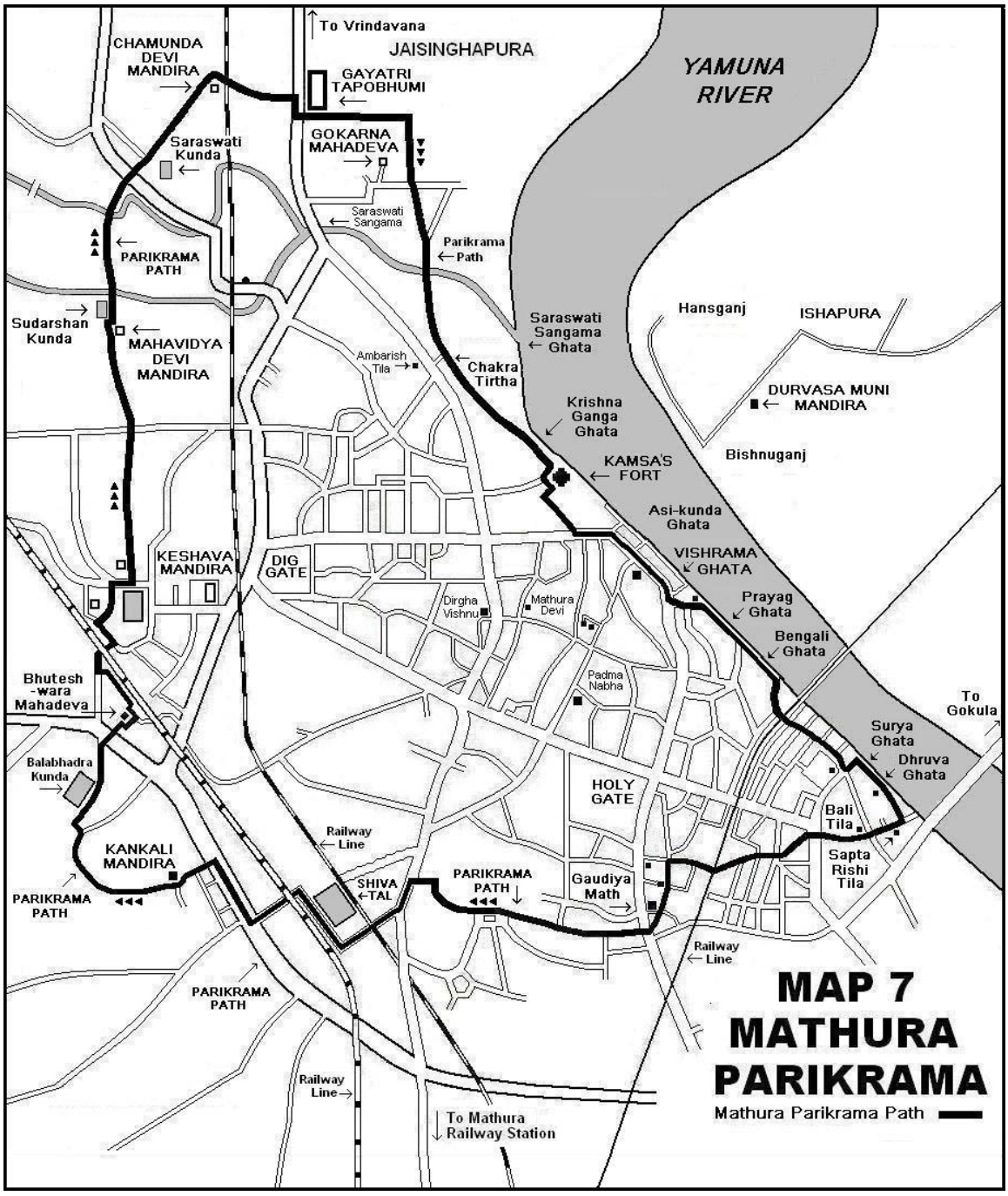
In the *Vishnu Purana* it is said. **"Shatrughna founded Mathura after killing the powerful demon Lavanashura."** The *Shrimad Bhagavatam* (SB 9.11.15) says, **"Shatrughna killed a Rakshasa named Lavana, who was the son of Madhu Rakshasa. Thus he established in the great forest known as Madhuvana, the town known as Mathura."**

During the twenty-fourth Treta-*yuga* of the *Vaivasvata-manvantara*, shortly after the great demon Ravana had been killed by Lord Ramachandra in the Lankan war, Lord Ramachandra sent His younger brother Shatrughna to Madhuvana forest in order to kill the demon Lavanasura, who was at that time one of the last remaining demons living on earth. Lavanasura was the son of the demon Madhu who had previously been slain by Lord Vishnu. Shatrughna came from Ayodhya to Madhuvana and after a fierce battle killed the demon Lavanasura, after which he established the city of Mathura Puri. This fact has also been confirmed by Valmiki Muni in the *uttara-khanda* of the *Ramayana*. According to some *Puranas*, Prince Ayu, the son of King Sudyumna, founder of the Chandra-*vamsa* dynasty of *Ksatriya* kings, established the first city of Mathura during the fifth Treta-*yuga* of the *Vaivasvata-manvantara* long before the appearance of Lord Ramachandra and Shatrughna, who appeared much later in the twenty-fourth Treta-*yuga*. King Sudyumna, who ruled all the lands on the western bank of the Ganges, had established his capitol at Pratistanpur (Prayag). He was followed on the throne by his son Nahusha. After Nahusha, Maharaja Yayati ascended the throne of Pratistanpura around the twelfth Treta-*yuga* followed by his son Yadu. At this time the kings of the Chandra-*vamsa* Yadava dynasty began their rule over Mathura.

Some authorities have said that the famous Emperor Mandhata Maharaja of the Surya-*vamsa* dynasty of Ayodhya, who was ruling all the lands east of the Ganges during the period of the fifteenth Treta-*yuga*, also gained control over Mathura before being slain in battle by Lavanasura. Lavanasura ruled over the area around Madhuban forest from his capitol named Madhu Nagari, inherited from his farther the demon Madhu Rakshasa, but after Lavanasura's death, Shatrughana, who like Lord Ramachandra, belonged to the Surya-*vamsa* dynasty, built a new city on the spot where the present city of Mathura now stands. After some years the Chandra-*vamsa* dynasty of Yadava kings regained control of Mathura and ruled unimpeded right up until the time of Vajranabha Maharaja, Lord Krishna's great grandson. Throughout the long course of Indian history, Mathura has always been one of the grandest and most important cities in the entire subcontinent and according to the *Puranas,* it is one of the oldest existing city in the world. Mathura was the capitol of the Surasena kingdom ruled by the Yadavas and one of the original sixteen *Janapadas* or large urban cities during the late Vedic period after the battle of Kurukshetra. The city reached the zenith of its fame when the incarnation of Vishnu, Lord Shri Krishna took birth here as the son of Vasudeva and Devaki in the prison cell of King Kamsa.

The Glories of Mathura Puri

In the *Adi-varaha Purana*, Lord Varahadeva told Bhumi Devi, the goddess of the earth. **"O Devi, within all the three worlds there is certainly no place superior to Mathura. I live there eternally throughout the ages."** And in the *Brahmanda Purana* it is said**. "The precious attainment of ecstatic love, which is rarely obtained by serving all the holy places within the three worlds, can easily be attained simply by touching the dust of Mathura."** In the *Padma Purana* it says. **"Mathura is more glorious than the Vaikuntha Dhama of Narayana. Anyone who spends even one day in Mathura will become devoted to the lotus feet of Shri Hari."** Again in the *Adi-varaha Purana* the



following verse appears. **"If the killer of a *brahmana*, a drunkard, a killer of cows, or any person who violates *brahmacharya* circumambulates Mathura, he will be freed from the results of his sins. A pilgrim, who comes from a far away country and circumambulates Mathura, purifies whoever sees him and relieves them of their sins."**

The holy city of Mathura is celebrated in the Vedic scriptures as having the shape of a half moon which is caused by the River Yamuna running in a crescent shape along the cities eastern boundary. In the *Adi-varaha Purana* it says. **"Those who live in this half-moon shaped place undoubtedly attain liberation. One who controls his eating and bathes here achieves the imperishable abode; of this there is no doubt. Hey Devi! Those who**

leave their body at this crescent moon shaped region reach My abode, Vaikuntha. Those who take bath or perform other pious activities here, even if they die at another place without a proper funeral ceremony, still they are eligible for liberation. One, who dies here, although sinful, is worshipable in Brahmaloka for as long as his bones remain at this place." It also says. **"The Siddhas, Bhutas, and Devas see the inhabitants of Mathura as possessing four arms."**

The *Padma Purana* says. **"Attachment for Mathura is aroused only in those fortunate persons who have firm devotion to Shri Hari and have achieved His grace."** The *Vayu Purana* it says. **"Aho! This Mathura Dhama is even more superior to and also more blessed than Vaikuntha, the Dhama of Shri Narayana. By residing here for only one day one attains Krishna-*bhakti* and by residing here for three nights, one attains the most rare Krishna-*prema* which is rare even for the most liberated of souls."** The *Adi-varaha Purana* also says. **"O Devi, the result one receives by residing in Varanasi for one thousand years is achieved by residing in Mathura simply for a moment."**

The city of Mathura is mentioned in the *Puranas* to be one of the famous *sapta-puris* or seven most holy cities of Hinduism, where one can achieve *moksha* or liberation, the others are Haridwara, Kashi, Ujjain, Dwaraka, Kanchi, and Ayodhya. In the *Padma Purana* it says. **"Amongst the *sapta-puris,* Mathura is the topmost and is considered even superior to Vaikuntha, because in Mathura one can awaken devotion to Lord Hari."** There are a number of very famous deities that were established in Mathura including; Keshavaji, Dirgha Vishnu, Mathura Devi, Mahavidya Devi, Adi Varaha, Sweta Varaha, Gatashrama Narayana, Swayambhu Padmanabha, Dwarkadisha, Gokarna Mahadeva, and Bhuteshwara Mahadeva. Within the holy city of Mathura are many sacred hills and amongst them nine are most famous including; Ambarisha Tila, Dhruva Tila, Bali Tila, Sapta-rishi Tila, Gatashrama Tila, Kamsa Tila, Hanumana Tila, Kali-*yuga* Tila, and Rajaka-vada Tila. The celebrated *kundas* of Mathura include; Balabhadra-kunda, Potra-kunda, Saraswati-kunda, Sudarshana Moksha-kunda, and Shiva Tala. The ancient walled city of Mathura is also famous for its four gates namely; Vrindavana Gate, Dig Gate, Bharatpur Gate, and Holy Gate.

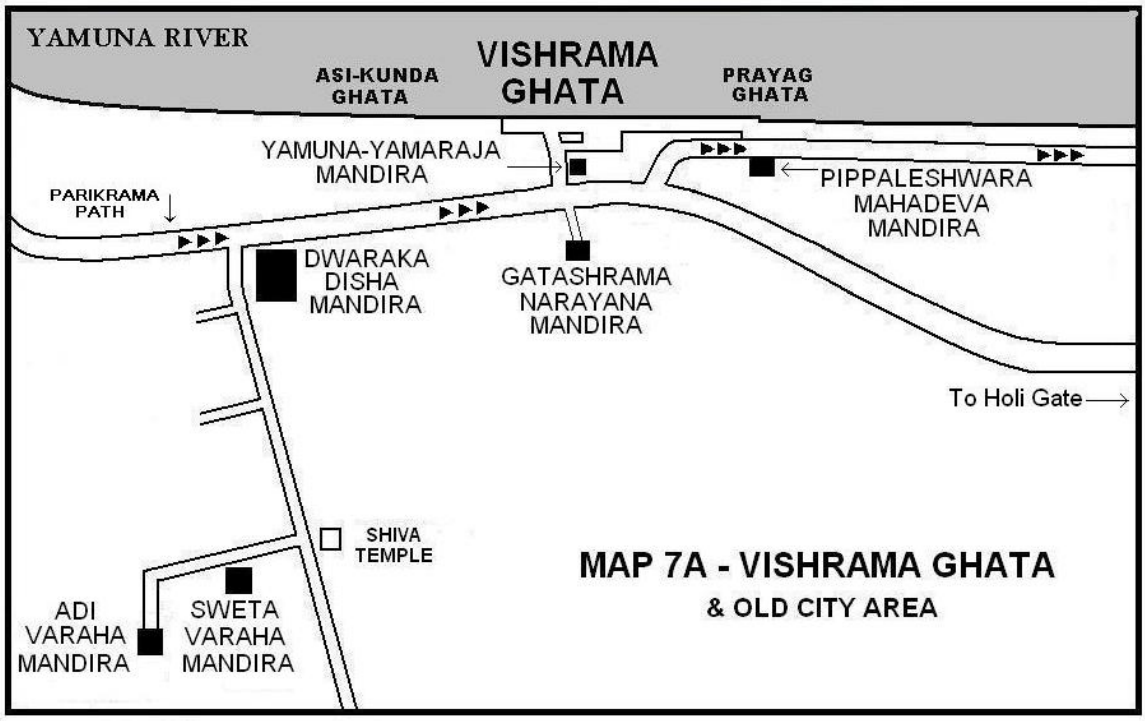
How To Get There: (see map no. 7)

The Sacred Ghatas on the River Yamuna

Mathura is especially famous for its twenty-five sacred bathing *ghatas* along the banks of the Yamuna River. These *ghatas* which are also called *tirthas* are considered to be the best of all bathing *ghatas* in the entire universe, far superior to Prayag's *triveni-sangam*, or even such places as Kasi, Gaya, Ujjain, Rishikesh, or Haridwara. In the *Skanda Purana* it says. **"Just as a piece of iron is transformed into gold by being touched by a touchstone, similarly by the touch of the Yamuna's water, a sinful person becomes pious."** The *Padma Purana* says, "**Whoever dies on the bank of Yamuna within the Mathura Mandala, he achieves the same features as Lord Vishnu**." In the *Matsya Purana* it says, **"If one takes bath in the Yamuna seven generations of his family become purified."**

The *ghatas* at Mathura have been worshiped since the beginning of time and in the Satya-*yuga* many great personalities took bath at these *ghatas* including all the important demigods headed by Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva, as well as the seven great sages (*sapta-rishis)*, Dhruva Maharaja, Ambarisha Maharaja, Bali Maharaja, Durvasa Muni, Dattatreya, Angira, Parashara, and others. Even *asuras* like Ravana performed *tapasya* here. During the four months of *chaturmasya*, the *Puranas* say that all the holy *tirthas* of the universe come to Mathura Dhama to bathe and perform *seva-puja* on the banks of the Yamuna, to purify themselves of the accumulated sins left behind at their *tirthas* by visiting pilgrims.

When Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu arrived at Mathura, He first bathed at Vishrama Ghata and took *darshana* of Krishna's birthplace and the Keshavadeva Mandira. The next day Lord Chaitanya bathed in all the twenty-four other *ghatas* along the Yamuna. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, there are twelve *ghatas* to the north of Vishrama Ghata and twelve *ghatas* to the south. The names of these *ghatas* which are also called *tirthas*, are from north to south; Uttara Koti-tirtha, Vighnaraja-tirtha, Dashashmavamedha-tirtha, Chakra-tirtha, Saraswati Patana-tirtha, Soma-tirtha, Brahma-tirtha, Ghanta Bharanaka-tirtha, Naga-tirtha



Dharapatana-tirtha, Samyamana-tirtha, Nava-tirtha, **Vishrama-tirtha**, Avimukta-tirtha, Guhya-tirtha, Prayag-tirtha, Kankhala-tirtha, Tinduka-tirtha, Surya-tirtha, Bata Swami-tirtha, Dhruva-tirtha, Rishi-tirtha, Moksha-tirtha, Dakshina Koti-tirtha, Bodhi-tirtha.

The Half Parikrama of Mathura

There are some authorities who say that after bathing at Vishrama Ghata, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama party should first perform a half-*parikrama* of Mathura from Vishrama Ghata to Bhuteshwara Mahadeva and then after having *darshana* of Lord Keshavadeva and the Shri Krishna Janmasthana, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama proceeds to Madhuvana.

MATHURA HALF PARIKRAMA

M.1 **Vishrama Ghata / Vishranti-tirtha**

This is where Krishna rested after killing the despotic ruler of Mathura, the evil demon known as King Kamsa. When Lord Chaitanya visited Mathura, He also took bath here at Vishrama Ghata and rested here for some time. In ancient times, Lord Varahadeva, after lifting the earth from the Garbha Ocean and slaying the demon Hiranyaksha, also came here and rested. While He was resting at this place, Lord Varahadeva spoke about the glories of Vraja Mandala to the goddess Bhumi Devi, the mother earth, and these descriptions of the holy Dhama were recorded in the *Adi-varaha Purana*. The word *'vishrama'* or *'vishranti'* means 'to rest' or a 'resting place'.

The *Skanda Purana* says**. "One who bathes here will destroy all his sins and be freed from the agony and misery of the material world."** The *Padma Purana* says. **"Bathing at Vishrama Ghata, is one hundred times more superior to bathing in the Ganges River at the *triveni-sangam* during the *Magh-mela*."** In the *Mathura Mahatmya* it says. **"Bathing at Keshi Ghata is one hundred times more beneficial than bathing in the river Ganges, but to bathe at Vishrama Ghata, is one hundred times more beneficial than bathing at Keshi Ghata."** In the *Saura Purana* it says. **"Vishranti-tirtha destroys all sins and offers rest from the fatigue of wandering through the desert of material existence. Anyone who bathes here and worships Achyuta will be released from the**

fire of material existence and attain immortality." The *Adi-varaha Purana* says, **"Hey Devi! Vishranti-tirtha is renowned throughout the three worlds. A person becomes worshipable in Vaikuntha-dhama if he takes bath here. Lord Gatashrama (Narayana) is situated here in this beautiful place. By His *darshana* one achieves the results from bathing in all other holy places."** Also situated around the vicinity of Vishrama Ghata are a number of important temples including those dedicated to; Yamunaji, Krishna-Balarama, Vasudeva-Devaki, Annapurna Devi, the Yamaraja-Yamuna Mandira, and Gatashram Narayana Mandira, as well as the famous Dwarkadisha Mandira.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7A)

M.2 **Yamaraja-Yamuna Mandira**

This temple is known locally as the Yama-Yami Mandira and is dedicated to the brother and sister duo, Lord Yamaraja and Yamuna Devi, whose father was the sun god Lord Surya-Narayana. There is a great Hindu festival held here during *Karttik* every year the day after Govardhana-*puja* and known as *Bhaiyaduja* or *Yama-dwitiya*, when brothers and sisters come here from all over Vraja to bathe together in the River Yamuna at Vishrama Ghata and then perform *puja* at the Yama-Yami Temple.

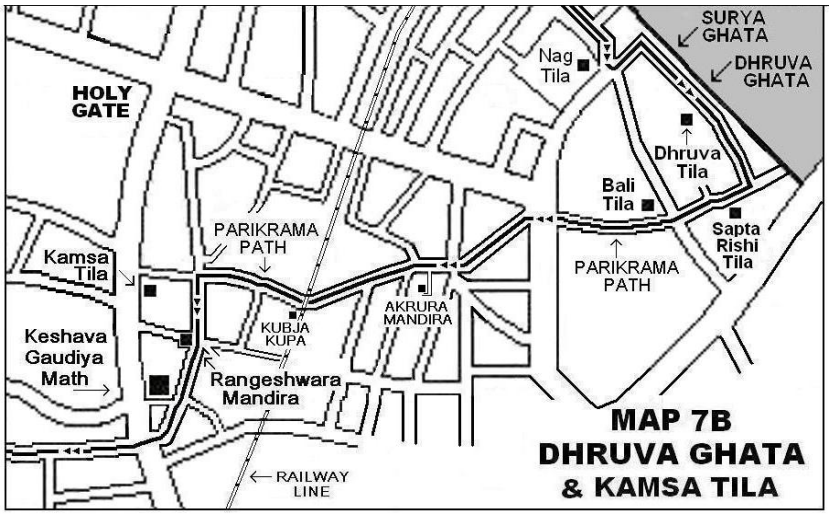
This festival is held in celebration of the time when Lord Yamaraja, came to visit his sister on her birthday. Lord Yamaraja had been longing to meet his twin sister and finally got the opportunity during her birthday celebrations. Yamuna Devi received her brother in the most befitting manner and served him with a wonderfully prepared meal. Lord Yamaraja was so pleased with the reception and service of his sister; he asked her what benediction she wanted. The ever-merciful Yamuna Devi asked for a special boon, that if any brother and sister bathed together in the River Yamuna on her birthday, they would be freed from their sins and not be called to the court of Yamaraja at the time of death. Lord Yamaraja agreed to Yamuna Devi's proposal saying, "So be it". Therefore on this day, hundreds and thousands of brothers and sisters travel from all over Vraja to take their bath in the River Yamuna on this particular day.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7A)

M.3 **Pippaleshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

This deity of Lord Shiva is one of the protectors of Mathura known as the *ksetra-palas*. The word *'ksetra'* means 'area' or 'field' and *'pala'* means 'guard' or 'protector'. The other three *ksetra-palas* of Mathura are Bhuteshwara, Rangeshwara, and Gokarneshwara. The deity is named after the sage Pippalada, who was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and was once saved from impending danger by Lord Shiva. The name Pippaleshwara means the Lord and protector of the great sage Pippalada.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7A)



M.4 **Dhruva Ghata / Dhruva-tirtha**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that this is where the boy saint Dhruva Maharaja took bath and where he performed penance on a nearby hillock, and anyone who bathes here will at the time of death achieve the pole star known as Dhruvaloka, where Dhruva now resides. The pole star is also referred to as Swetadwipa and is mentioned in the *Puranas* to be a localized Vaikuntha planet within the material universe and the residence of Lord Ksiradakshayi Vishnu. It is also said that whatever austerities and *sadhanas* are performed at Dhruva Ghata they will be magnified one hundred times. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Shrila Narada Muni gave the following instructions to Dhruva. **"My dear boy, you should go to the bank of the Yamuna, where there is a virtuous forest named Madhuvana, and there be purified. Just by going there, one draws nearer to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who always lives there. In the waters of the Yamuna River, you should take bath three times daily because the water is very auspicious, sacred, and clear. After bathing you should perform the necessary regulative principles for *ashtanga*-yoga and then sit down on your *asana* in a calm and quiet position."** It is also said that Dhruva Maharaja was also engaged in penance on a hill deep within the Madhuvana forest near Krishna-kunda, where he eventually received the *darshana* of Lord Vishnu in His divine form of Lord Prishnigarbha.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.5 **Sapta-rishi Tila / Rishi-tirtha**

In the *Skanda Purana* it says that in the forest of Madhuvana is Rishi Tirtha and one who bathes there achieves devotion to Lord Hari. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that one who bathes at Rishi Tirtha goes to Vishnuloka. Nearby is the hillock known as the Sapta-rishi Tila where one can see the deities of the seven great sages who are known collectively as the Sapta-rishis. It is said that they performed penance here on the bank of the Yamuna in the Madhuvana forest. There is also another Rishi Tila on the opposite side of the Yamuna near the *ashrama* of Durvasa Muni.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & &B)

M.6 **Bali Tila**

This is where Bali Maharaja performed a great *yajna* performed by the *brahmana* descendents of Brighu Muni, so that he could conquer the heavenly planets ruled by Indra. As Sukracharya was the son of Brighu, and also the family priest of Bali Maharaja, it is believed that he performed this sacrifice. There is also a temple here of Lord Vamanadeva, who eventually begged back the heavenly kingdom captured by Bali and returned it to the demigods.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.7 **Akrura Mandira / Akrura Bhavana**

There is a very small shrine here containing the deity of Akruraji and also a bas-relief deity of Krishna and Balarama riding on Akrura's chariot. This place is said to be the residence of Akrura who was Krishna's paternal uncle and who brought Krishna and Balarama from Nandagrama to Mathura on his chariot. Krishna also visited Akrura's house after He had killed Kamsa and reinstalled Maharaja Ugrasena on the throne of Mathura.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.8 **Kubja Kupa (Kubja's Well)**

This is Kubja Kupa or the well where Kubja, the hunchback servant of Kamsa first met Krishna and Balarama. She was on her way to Kamsa's palace carrying precious sandalwood pulp for the king. When Krishna saw the hunchback girl carrying the sandalwood pulp, He asked her to present it to Himself and Balarama. When Kubja saw Krishna, she was completely overcome with His beauty and desired to serve Him as His wife. She therefore offered the precious sandalwood to Krishna and Balarama and then smeared Their limbs with the fragrant pulp. Krishna was so pleased by her devotion; He placed His

foot over hers and holding her by the cheeks, lifted her up with a jerk, and thus straightened out her body, simultaneously making her even more beautiful than an Apsara from the heavenly planets. Seeing the sudden transformation of her body, with such attractive features and stunning beauty, she immediately invited Krishna to visit her house so that she might satisfy her desire to embrace Him. Krishna agreed, but only after His work in Mathura was completed. It is said that next to Kubja Kupa was Kubja's house (*koti*) where she formerly lived. After Krishna had killed Kamsa and reestablished Ugrasena on the throne of Mathura, He went with Uddhava to Kubja's house to satisfy her desires and at the same time purify her and convert her into a pure devotee.

In her previous life, it is said that Kubja had been Ravana's sister Surparnakha, who, after seeing the beauty of Lord Rama, fell in love with him. As Rama was not interested in any woman other than Sita, Surparnakha felt rejected and then approached Lakshmana, Rama's brother, who also rejected her proposal, she then flew into an envious rage and attacked Sita with her sharpened nails, Lakshmana immediately cut off her nose and disfigured her. The word '*suparanakha*' means 'one with sharpened nails'. Superanakha went to Lanka and complained to Ravana who then abducted Sita as a reprisal. Later, Surparnakha went to Pushkara-*tirtha* to undergo penance to achieve Lord Rama as her husband. Lord Shiva finally gave her the boon that she would be able to enjoy the position of the Lord's wife when Krishna would appear at Mathura during the Dwarapa-*yuga*.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.9 **Kamsa Tila / Ranga-bhumi**

Kamsa Tila was situated on a small hill in the middle of showground on which a royal pavilion was erected and from where King Kamsa could view the festivities in the showground below. Kamsa Tila is the actual place where Krishna killed the demon Kamsa inside the arena of the Ranga-bhumi. The Ranga-bhumi is also known as the Ranga-shala, and it is the place where Kamsa had organized a large public gathering called the *Danur-yajna* or 'Sacrifice of the bow'. The word *'ranga-bhumi'* means a 'show-ground', and '*ranga-shala'* means an 'arena' where 'public spectacles' like sacrifices or wrestling matches are held. On the day of the sacrifice, a wrestling match had also been arranged and large crowds had gathered to see the event.

When Krishna and Balarama tried to enter the Ranga-shala, the great elephant Kuvalayapida, who had been posted at the gateway by Kamsa, attempted to trample Krishna to death; however, Krishna very easily slew the great elephant, and while carrying the dead elephants tusk as a trophy, entered the Ranga-shala where He immediately broke the great sacrificial bow of Lord Shiva. Krishna and Balarama were then forced into a wrestling match with Kamsa's two champion wrestlers Chanura and Mustika, who had been ordered to kill Them during the contest. However, after a titanic battle, Krishna and Balarama slew the great wrestlers, much to Kamsa's great horror. Suddenly Krishna jumped on to the raised platform where Kamsa was sitting in his pavilion and catching hold of him, threw him from his royal balcony on to the ground, Krishna then dragged Kamsa around the arena by his hair and in full view of the crowds, killed him by beating him on the head with His powerful fists. Because Kamsa was killed near this hill, it became famous as Kamsa Tila.

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* this place is referred to as Kamsa-khali, or the place where Kamsa was delivered. After Kamsa had been killed, his dead body was the dragged down to the Yamuna to be cremated. As Kamsa's gigantic body was dragged along the ground, it gouged out a deep channel in the earth from the Ranga-bhumi to the Yamuna that became known as Kamsa-khara. In his previous life Kamsa had been born as Kalanemi, the son of the great demon Hiranyaksha, who was also killed by Lord Vishnu.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.10 **Rangeshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

Situated near to the Ranga-bhumi is the deity of Lord Shiva known as Rangeshwara Mahadeva, who is another of the *ksetra-palas* protecting Mathura. This is one of Mathura's

most popular shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva and is also known as the Siddhamukha Rudra Mandira

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.11 **Keshava Gaudiya Matha**

This is the temple where in 1959; Shrila Prabhupada accepted the *tridandi sannyasa* religious order from his beloved god-brother Bhakti Prajnana Keshava Maharaja. The deity of Lord Chaitanya standing on the *simhasana* next to Radha and Krishna was presented to the temple by Shrila Prabhupada some years earlier, when Shrila Prabhupada came from Allahabad on a visit to Mathura.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7B)

M.12 **Shiva Tala**

This sacred tank is one of Mathura's most celebrated *kundas* in Mathura and is dedicated to Lord Shiva who performed penance at this place in order to achieve the mercy of Lord Krishna. The word '*tala'* means a 'lake' or '*kunda'*.

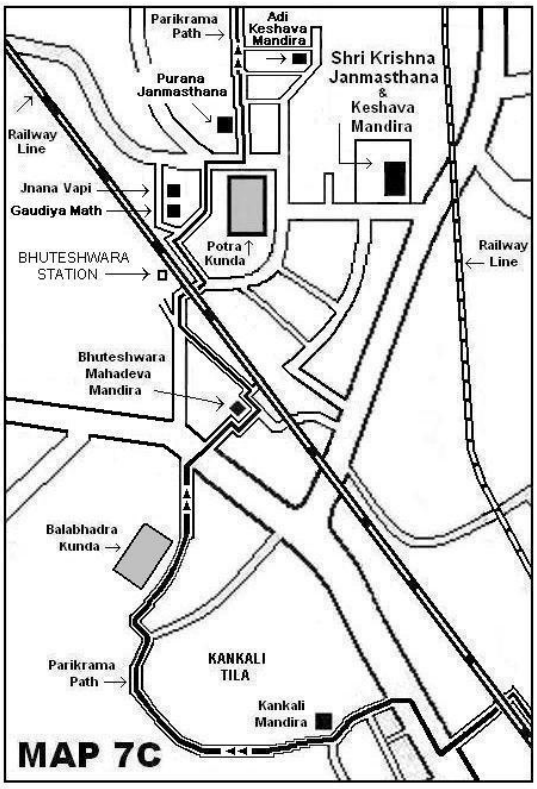
M.13 **Kankali Mandira / Kankali Tila**

This deity of Kali Mata is said to have been personally worshiped by King Kamsa. The name 'Kankali' is derived from 'Kamsa-Kali, or 'the Kali worshiped by Kamsa'. The temple is located on a small hill known as Kankali Tila.

M.14 **Balabhadra-kunda**

According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, Krishna and Balarama came here to sport in the waters of this *kunda* with their cowherd boyfriends while they were roaming around the city of Mathura, prior to the killing of Kamsa. Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men from Vrindavana had also arrived in Mathura along with their sons the cowherd boys to attend the *Danur-yajna*, and were camped not far from this place just on the outskirts of Mathura.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)



M.15 **Bhuteshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

This is one of the most famous temples of Lord Shiva in the whole of Vraja. The Shiva-*linga* was established by Vajranabha five thousand years ago as one of the *dig-palas* or protecting deities of Vrindavana Dhama. Bhuteshwara is also one of the *ksetra-palas* protecting the western side of Mathura. It is said in the *Vishnu Purana*. **"Mathura is the abode of Mahadeva, the deity of all deities and a great devotee of Lord Hari. Mahadeva executed his penances at Mathura."** According to some traditions, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama may start from the temple of Bhuteshwara Mahadeva in the month of Bhadra (August-September), just after the celebration of Shri Krishna Janmashtami.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

M.16 **Jnana-vapi**

The ancient *tirtha* of Jnana-vapi is located next to the Guru-Govinda Gaudiya Matha Temple. This ancient well is said to have been established by Dharmaraja (Yamaraja) in the Satya-*yuga* and according to the *Adi-varaha Purana*, anyone who bathes here automatically removes the evil influence of malefic planets and achieves both *jnana* (knowledge) and Vishnu-*bhakti* (devotion). It is said that Lord Chaitanya came here after having *darshana* of Lord Keshavadeva to take a sacred bath and perform *achamana*. Lord Chaitanya also stayed near here and took meals in the house of a *sanadiya-brahmana* who was a disciple of Madhavendra Puri Goswami, the *parama-guru* of Lord Chaitanya. A large well with steps going down inside it is known as a *bavadi* or *bowri* and from this word it appears the name *vapi* has been derived. At the present time this *bavadi* is dry and now being used by Muslims who worship the shrine of a Sufi saint who once lived here.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

M.17 **Potra-kunda**

After Krishna's birth in the prison cell of Kamsa, it is said that mother Devaki came to Potra-kunda to bathe and wash clothing. It is said that while filled with ecstatic love, Devaki happily washed Krishna's baby-linen, hence the name '*potra'*, which is derived from the word '*putra'* which means 'son'. Some say the *kunda* was formerly known as Pavitra-kunda but was later changed to Potra-kunda.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

M.18 **Prachin-Janmasthana (Vasudeva-Devaki Mandira)**

The word '*prachin*' means 'old' or 'original' and '*janmasthana'* means 'birthplace'. This place and is said to be the exact spot where the prison cell of King Kamsa was located and thus the actual place where Lord Krishna was born. The Prachin-Janmasthana is also known as 'Kamsa Kara-garh', which means Kamsa's 'prison-cell'. The Prachin-Janmasthana is situated in the area known as Mallapura where the wrestlers employed by Kamsa, including Chanura and Mushtaka, used to live. The wrestlers, who were part of the royal bodyguard, were given the responsibility to guard Vasudeva and Devaki during their period of imprisonment. The word '*malla*' means 'wrestler' and 'Mallapura' means the 'residence of the wrestlers', further confirming that the Prachin Janmasthan at Mallapura is the actual site of Kamsa's prison. There is a small temple at the Prachin-Janmasthana where the deities of Vasudeva and Devaki along with baby Krishna can be seen. The local scholars and people of Mathura recognize this Prachin-Janmasthana as being the original birthplace of Lord Krishna.

The *Chaitanya-charitamrita* says that Lord Chaitanya also visited Krishna's birthplace before going for *darshana* of Lord Keshavadeva. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* also mentions that Raghava Pandita, Srinivasa Pandita and Narottama Dasa also visited the room where Krishna was born during their *parikrama* of Mathura. It is interesting to note that the site presently advertised as the Janmasthana lying at the rear of the Keshava Mandira did not exist at this time. Historical records show that from around the year 1951, when the land containing the ruins of the ancient Keshava Mandira was acquired by the Keshava Mandira

Trust for building a new temple, a room in an old basement next to the wall of the mosque was advertised as being the actual site of the Janmasthana where Krishna was born. Previous to this, the Prachin-Janmasthana was the place recognized by everyone as Krishna's birthplace. Gaudiya scholars have concluded that the new 'Janmasthana site' behind the recently-built Keshava Mandira should be seen as a *smriti-sthala* (place of remembrance), while the Prachin Janmasthana should be recognized as the actual site of Lord Krishna's birth.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

M.19 **Krishna Kupa / Maratha Mandira**

This famous well known as Krishna Kupa has now been covered over and shops have been constructed on the spot. The well was situated at the northern gate of the Keshavadeva Mandira next to the place where the Maratha kings established a temple of Keshavaji in 1790, after having driven out the Mughals from Mathura around 1720. Because Aurangzeb had destroyed the original Keshava temple in 1669, and erected a mosque on the site, the Marathas built a new temple here at this location, which is known as the Adi-Keshavaji Mandira where the *vijay-murti* from the old Keshava Mandira was installed. The *vijay-murti* is the replica deity (*pratibhu-murti*) that was taken out of the original Keshava Mandira on a *ratha* during festival days. It is said that the body of this deity is marked with the signs of the twenty-four primary *avataras* of Vishnu. Only the old gateway and part of the temple boundary wall built by the Maratha's remains today. The original deity of Keshavadeva established by Vajranabha was moved to Rasadhana near Kanpur in 1669, prior to the destruction of the temple by the tyrant Aurangzeb. Unfortunately this deity was stolen by thieves some forty years ago and has not been seen since then.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

M.20 **Keshava Mandira**

This is the latest in a long line of temples built at this spot where the ancient Keshava Mandira was first built by Vajranabha Maharaja more than five thousand years earlier. In the new temple one can see the *pratibhu murti* of Lord Keshavadeva. The original deity of Lord Keshavadeva was said to have been saved from being destroyed by Aurangzeb's soldiers and was secretly taken to a small town called Rasadhan near Kanpur for safety. Within days the Keshava Mandira was destroyed by the soldiers of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1669. At that time, the Harideva deity from Govardhana was also taken to Rasadhan. Both of these deities were being worshiped there from that time, but during the sixties or early seventies, the deity of Lord Keshavadeva was stolen and nobody knows its present whereabouts. The deity of Lord Harideva is still being worshiped at Rasadhan.

According to accounts by early European travelers in the 15TH Century, at the peak of its glory the Keshavadeva Mandira, which was built out of the finest red sandstone, was greater in size than the Jagannatha Puri Temple in Orissa, with its base measuring 217 x 34 yards, and its three *shikaras* or domes reaching over 250 feet into the sky and visible from a distance of at least twenty kilometers. The original deity of Lord Keshavadeva was carved out of pure black marble with large rubies for eyes. It appears that this same temple, which was built by Raja Vijaypal in 1150, was the one visited by Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu when He arrived in Mathura in 1515 on His *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala. Lord Chaitanya chanted the holy names and danced in ecstasy in front of Lord Keshavadeva for many hours. Large crowds gathered to see the unusual spectacle of the Lord's exhibiting such ecstatic transcendental emotions, as He danced and chanted the holy names of Krishna before the deity.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7 & 7C)

The Appearance of Lord Shri Krishna

The *Srimad Bhagavatam* says that Lord Shri Krishna was born on the stroke of midnight from the womb of Devaki in the prison cell of King Kamsa. The evil hearted Kamsa had imprisoned Devaki and her husband Vasudeva just after their wedding ceremony, when

he heard an omen from the sky informing him that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. After locking-up Devaki and Vasudeva, Kamsa systematically slaughtered all the babies born of Devaki, by dashing them on a stone one after the other. Kamsa believed that the seventh baby must have been a miscarriage because after some period of pregnancy, no baby was born. Unknown to Kamsa, the baby, who was actually Lord Balarama, was transferred by the power of the *yogamaya* potency, from Devaki's womb to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva's second wife, who was staying at his friend Nanda's house in Gokula for safety.

According to the *Vedas*, Lord Krishna appears once in every day of Brahma in order to save His devotees and kill all the demons disturbing the world. When Devaki became pregnant for the eighth time, Kamsa remained vigilant and waited in great trepidation for this particular child to be born. On the stroke of midnight at the appointed time of His birth, Lord Krishna appeared before Vasudeva and Devaki, not as an ordinary baby, but in a four-armed form of Lord Narayana, dressed in shining yellow silk and holding all the symbols of Vishnu in his four hands. Understanding that the Supreme Lord had been born as their son, Vasudeva and Devaki were struck with wonder and began offering their heartfelt prayers to the Lord. The demigods headed by Brahma and Shiva began showering flowers from the sky in great jubilation. At that moment, Lord Krishna spoke to Vasudeva and Devaki informing them that in their previous life, they had been born as Sutapa and Prishni, and that Lord Prishnigarbha had at that time been born as their son, then in their next life as Kashyapa and Diti, Lord Vamanadeva had been born as their son. Now in this present life as Vasudeva and Devaki, Lord Krishna had appeared as their son within the prison cell of Kamsa.

After appearing before them as Narayana and having blessed them, Lord Krishna informed Vasudeva that He should take Him to the village of Gokula for safety, and then manifested His two armed form as an ordinary baby boy. Vasudeva suddenly became full of anxiety because he knew that when Kamsa came to know about the birth of the eighth child, he would immediately dash this baby to death as he has done the others. At that moment, under the influence of *yogamaya*, the shackles attached to Vasudeva's feet fell off and the doors to the prison cell opened; outside the guards suddenly fell fast asleep. Vasudeva then picked up the new-born child and placing Him in a wicker basket, cautiously made his way out of the prison and braving the stormy weather, headed for Gokula where hi friend Nanda Maharaja lived. When he arrived at the bank of the Yamuna, he saw the river was in full spate due to the storm. Nevertheless, with great difficulty he waded across the Yamuna and arrived at the village of Gokula. Mother Yashoda had just given birth to a baby girl and due to exhaustion was now sleeping soundly on her bed. Under cover of darkness, on reaching Nanda's house, Vasudeva entered the delivery room and picking up the baby girl, replaced her with baby Krishna.

Returning to Kamsa's prison cell in Mathura, Vasudeva placed the baby girl next to Devaki and after closing the cell door, placed the shackles back on his feet and went to sleep. It was just before dawn when the guards heard the baby crying and ran to call Kamsa. Rushing to the spot, Kamsa entered the prison cell and ruthlessly snatched the baby away from Devaki's arms. Vasudeva pleaded that the eighth baby was a girl, and the omen had said a boy, not a girl, would kill him, saying that this baby girl should not be killed. Ignoring the words of Vasudeva, Kamsa angrily raised the baby girl in order to smash her on the ground, but suddenly the baby slipped from his grasp and rose into the sky while simultaneously assuming the eight armed form of goddess Durga, an expansion of Yogamaya Devi. The goddess then informed Kamsa that the eighth child, who was going to kill him, had already been born elsewhere. After saying this, the goddess suddenly disappeared into the sky leaving Kamsa bewildered and confused.

Meanwhile in Gokula, mother Yashoda woke up to the cries for milk from her newborn baby and holding Him in her arms, allowed the baby to suck her breast milk. Due to the exhaustion of giving birth, Yashoda Mayi could not remember whether a boy or a girl had been born to her that night. Nanda Maharaja was overjoyed to see the birth of a son and immediately arranged for a great celebration and donated thousands of cows to the local *brahmanas*. In the prison cell of Kamsa; Vasudeva and Devaki, knowing that their eighth

child was now safe and being overjoyed with happiness, began to meditate on giving away millions of cows in charity to all the *brahmanas*.

END OF MATHURA PARIKRAMA

BM.6 **MADHUVANA (Maholi)**

Madhuvana is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja. At the present time Madhuvana is known as Maholi and a large village now stands where the sacred forest once stood. The forest of Madhuvana has an individual *parikrama* of around five kilometers that passes through all the important places of interest including Krishna-kunda and Dhruva Tila. Madhuvana is one of the most famous amongst the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana and gains mention in many ancient *Puranas*. Unfortunately at the present time, this forest like many others in Vrindavana has almost totally disappeared and only a few trees remain of what was once a vast and verdant forest.

It is said that Madhuvana is the only sacred forest of Vrindavana where the Supreme Personality of Godhead performed transcendental pastimes in all the four *yugas*. In the Satya-*yuga*, He appeared here as Lord Madhusudana and slew a great demon named Madhu who had taken control of the sacred forest. He also appeared in the same Satya-*yuga* as Lord Prishnigarbha to give His blessings to Dhruva Maharaja, who was performing severe austerities here in the Madhuvana forest. In the Treta-*yuga,* He appeared here as Lord Shatrughna, the younger brother of Lord Ramacandra and slew the demon Lavanasura, the evil son of Madhudaitya. Then in the Dwarapa-*yuga*, the Lord appeared here in His original form as Lord Shri Krishna and performed many wonderful pastimes with the cowherd girls and boys of Vraja. In the Kali-*yuga*, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited the sacred forest of Madhuvana during His Vraja Mandala Parikrama in the year 1515, and took His bath in the sacred Krishna-kunda.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana one has to proceed 6km to Chhatikara and then turn south-bound on the Delhi to Agra road. (National Highway No.2) and proceed 11km to the Maholi junction, where one can see on the right the large white marble temple of Jai-gurudev (resembling the Taj Mahal). At this junction turn right down this road for 2km until you reach Maholi village. Proceed straight through the village to the other side where one can see Krishna-kunda on the left. This *kunda* is considered to be the centre of Madhuvana. (see map no. 8)

How Madhuvana Forest Got Its Name

There are many references in the Vedic scriptures regarding Madhuvana and according to the *Puranas* the forest was so named when Lord Madhusudana, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, slew the great demon Madhudaitya at this place. In the *Skanda Purana* it say's. **"Who can find the limits to the glories of Madhuvana, the forest which contains Mathura Puri. Here the Lord killed the demon Madhu, hence it is known in Mathura as Madhuvana.** The word *'madhu'* also means nectar, and because Lord Krishna engaged in many nectarine pastimes with the *gopi's* here, the forest became known as Madhuvana, In this transcendental forest, Lord Madhusudana Shri Krishna, expertly captured the hearts of the *gopi's* of Vraja and during the autumn season they enjoyed ecstatic *rasa-lila* pastimes on the banks of Krishna-kunda. Elsewhere it says that the forest got its name because large quantities of honey could be found here. The word *'madhu'* also means honey, and this was the forest where Krishna and Balarama would regularly come with their friends to enjoy their *madhupan-lila* of drinking honey liquor. After feeling intoxicated from drinking honey, Krishna and Balarama would dance and sing in transcendental ecstasy along with their cowherd boyfriends.

The Madhu Demon Killed at Madhuvana

According to the *Puranas*, in the Satya-*yuga* a very powerful demon named Madhu established his kingdom in the Madhuvana forest. The fact that the demon Madhu lived here in this forest is also confirmed in the *Gopala-tapani Upanishad*. Some have said that in his youth Madhu had been a royal prince but became degraded and turned into a very cruel and evil-hearted person, hence his father seeing his son's demoniac qualities was forced to

banish him from his kingdom. The demon Madhu began roaming here and there until he eventually arrived at Madhuvana and decided he would establish his kingdom at this place. Madhu, like other powerful demons, was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. After performing many severe penances in order to propitiate Lord Shiva, the merciful Shiva eventually appeared before the demon and awarded him with an infallible *trishul*, a three pronged spear, saying that as long as Madhu held this weapon in his hand, he could never be defeated in battle by any demigod or human being. Due to the uncommon power derived from the infallible *trishul,* the Madhu demon became completely fearless and was undefeatable in battle. It is said that he terrorized the entire area around Madhuvana and also persecuted the *rishis* and *brahmanas*. According to the *Puranas,* Madhu married one of Ravana's sisters and consequently formed a military alliance with him. The son born to Madhu from the womb of Ravan's sister was called Lavanasura. In due course of time, Lord Vishnu appeared in the Madhuvana forest and slew the Madhu demon. Because of His slaying this demon, the Lord became celebrated by the name of 'Madhusudana', which means 'Killer of the demon Madhu'.

Lord Ramachandra Sends Shatrughna to Madhuvana

After the death of the demon Madhu at the hands of Lord Vishnu, his demonic son named Lavanasura took over his father's kingdom and also inherited the infallible *trishul* weapon. It is also said that the great Surya-*vamsa* Emperor, Mandhata Maharaja, was killed in a fierce battle with the demon Lavanasura, who slew him with the very same infallible *trishul*. The demon Lavanasura let loose a reign of terror throughout the region and was particularly inimical towards the *rishis*, *brahmanas* and Vaishnavas. Lord Ramacandra, after hearing the earnest petitions of the sages headed by Bhagava Rishi and Chayavana Muni, He ordered His younger brother Shatrughna to accompany the sages to Madhuvana and slay the evil demon Lavanasura. Before sending him on his journey, Lord Rama ordered Shatrughna to establish his kingdom there at Madhuvana and crowned him as the King of Mathura Puri in an elaborate ceremony at Ayodhya performed by Vashista Muni. Lord Rama also presented Shatrughna with an infallible quiver of arrows with which to kill Lavanasura. It is said that the celestial arrows had belonged to Lord Vishnu, and were used to kill the two demon brothers Madhu and Kaitabha at the beginning of the creation. Lord Rama also presented Shatrughna with an ancient deity of Lord Adi-varaha that was to be installed in the new city. This particular deity was retrieved from the island of Lanka after the demon Ravana had been slain by Lord Rama. Ravana had taken the deity from Lord Indra after defeating him in battle and conquering the heavenly planets. According to the *Padma Purana*, Lord Varaha the boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is the original presiding deity of the Mathura Mandala, and is eternally situated on the southern petal of the lotus of Vraja, at a place known as Saukari-vateshwara (Batasar). According to the *Puranas,* whenever Lord Varaha advents Himself in order to save the world, He appears from His transcendental abode at Saukari-vateshwara.

Lord Shatrughna Vanquishes the Demon Lavanasura

It was in the Treta-*yuga* when Lord Vishnu incarnated on earth in the form of Lord Ramacandra and His three brothers namely; Bharata, Lakshmana, and Shatrughna, whose mission was to destroy all the demons and *rakshasas* that were overburdening the world at that time. Lord Ramachandra and His three brothers represent the *Chatur-vyuha*, or four original forms of Lord Vishnu namely; Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, and Anirudha.. On the ardent plea of the great sages, *rishis* and *brahmanas*, Lord Rama sent His brother Shatrughna to Madhuvanan in order to kill the demon Lavanasura and establish a kingdom there. Prior to his departure, after having been informed by Bhagava Rishi, Lord Rama warned Shatrughna about Lavanasura's infallible *trishul* weapon, saying that he should only challenge Lavanasura at the time when he went out hunting and did not carry the *trishul*.

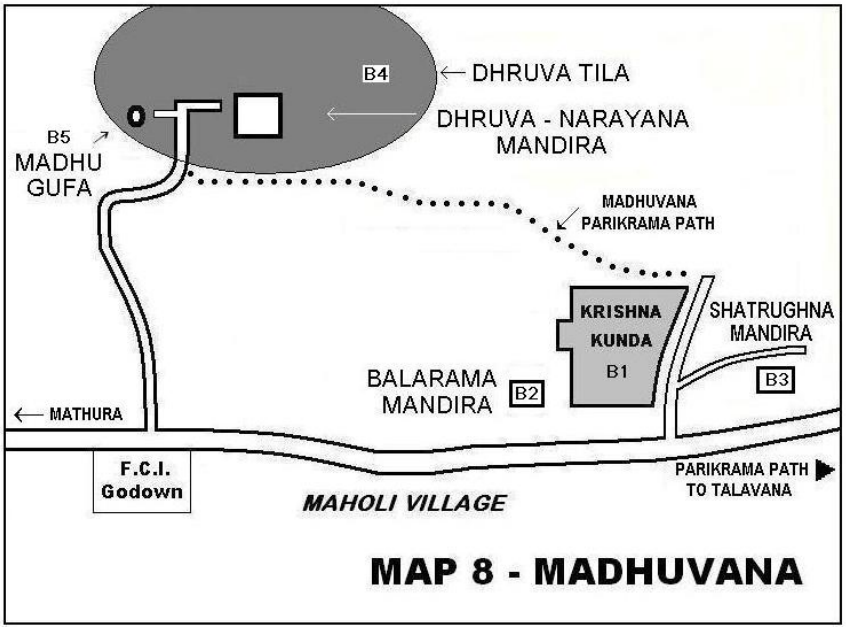
Waiting patiently for the most opportune moment to launch his attack on the powerful demon, Shatrughna heard that Lavanasura had gone into the forest to hunt, and as foretold, the demon did not take the infallible *trishul*, Shatrughna had his soldiers immediately block all the entrances to the demon's residence, which some say was located in

a huge underground cave, so that on his return he could not run inside the cave to get the *trishul* weapon. In the Ramayana, it mentions that Shatrugha waited at the eastern gate of Lavanasura's city. After waiting for some time, Shatrughna suddenly saw a ferocious looking giant coming out from the dense forest carrying under his arms a number of dead animals including two tigers, a water buffalo, a huge snake, a crocodile and a baby elephant. Realizing that this was the great demon Lavanasura returning from his hunting trip, Shatrughna came forward and challenged him to fight. In the fierce battle that took place, Shatrughna was ultimately able to sever the head of Lavanasura with a volley of celestial arrows. After killing the demon Lavanasura, Shatrughna established the city of Mathura on the banks of the Yamuna at Madhuvana. In the *Vishnu Purana* it is said. **"Shatrughna founded Mathura after killing the powerful demon Lavanasura."** After his great victory, Shatrughna installed the deity of Lord Adi-varaha given to him by Lord Rama, and even today this ancient deity of Lord Varahadeva is still being worshiped in Mathura, at the temple of Adi-varaha in the vicinity of the old city.

Places Of Interest At Madhuvana

B.1 **Krishna-kunda (Madhu-kunda)**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, it is said that in the sacred forest of Madhuvana one can see a very beautiful lake which is full of sweet transparent water and fragrant blue lotus flowers, and anyone who bathes there will achieve the fulfillment of all their desires. This sacred lake in Madhuvana forest is known as Krishna-kunda, or sometimes as Madhu-kunda and Madhuvana-kunda, and was the place where Krishna and Balarama performed many of Their transcendental pastimes. Krishna and Balarama often brought their cows to Madhuvana forest to graze on the sweet fresh grass that grew there. This pastime known as '



go-charana-lila' which means 'taking out the cows' or sometimes as '*ghoshta-vihara'* meaning 'ambrosial pastimes in the pastures' forms an integral part of Krishna and Balarama's daily activities of taking the the cows to pasturing grounds around Vraja. Once on a hot summer day, when Krishna was grazing His cows in Madhuvana forest, He created this *kunda* by pushing His flute into the ground so that the cows and cowherd boys could quench their thirst. This *kunda* then became famous as Krishna-kunda and Krishna and Balarama

would enjoy many wonderful picnics along with their friends on the banks of this celebrated *kunda*.

In the *Vraja-bhakti-vilasa*, all the presiding deities of the sacred forests of Vrindavana Dhama are mentioned, along with all the various mantras and invocations to be chanted while performing *archaman* or bathing in the various *kundas*, but this is highly ritualistic and impractical for most pilgrims to follow, therefore it is recommended that one should simply chant the supremely powerful *maha*-mantra when bathing or performing *archaman*, either here at Krishna-kunda, or at any other *kunda* in Vraja Mandala. When Lord Chaitanya was performing *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala, wherever He took bath or visited a temple, He always chanted the Hare Krishna *maha*-mantra.

How To Get There: After passing right through the Maholi village, Krishna-kunda can be seen on the left side of the road on the outskirts of the village. (see map no. 8).

B.2 Balarama Temple (Dauji Mandira)

This deity of Lord Balarama in this temple is considered to be the presiding deity of the village. The word *'Dau'* or 'Dauji' means elder brother, and is the affectionate name used by *Vrajavasis* for Lord Balarama, the elder brother of Lord Krishna. It is believed that the deity of Lord Balarama was established here at Krishna-kunda thousands of years ago. The original deity was unfortunately lost in the course of time and the present deity of Lord Balarama is the *'pratibhu-murti'* or replica of the original deity that possesses the same spiritual potency.

How To Get There: This temple is situated on the road-side just to the left of Krishna-kunda and at first glance resembles an ordinary house rather than a temple. (see map no. 8).

B.3 Satrughna Mandira

It is said that the deity of Lord Shatrughna was originally installed here at Madhuvana during the Treta-*yuga* and is known locally as Madhuvana-bihari, which means the 'Enjoyer of Madhuvana'. It is said that Lord Rama personally gave this name to his brother Shatrughna before sending him to Madhuvana. Unfortunately, the original deity was lost many years ago and the present deity is the *pratibhu* expansion. The old temple of Lord Shatrughna was built in the typical Vraja architectural style which became prominent during the period when the temples of the Six Gosvamis were built in Vrindavana. The Goswami temples were constructed in the late 16th and early 17th Centuries, therefore, the old temple of Lord Shatrughana that can be seen here today dates back about 400 years.

How To Get There: This temple is situated to the right of Krishna-kunda and hidden from general view. It is situated in a side-lane that goes up a slight incline behind some houses. The temple is just 10mt up the lane on the right. (see map no. 8)

B.4 Dhruva Tila

The word *'tila'* means a 'small hill', and this is the exact spot in Madhuvana forest where the famous child-saint Dhruva Maharaja performed austerities to please the Supreme Lord during the Satya-*yuga.* This is also the same place where Dhruva received the divine *darshana* of Lord Vishnu in His form as Lord Prishnigarbha. Dhruva Maharaja was a royal prince and son of the Aryan Emperor Uttanapada in the dynasty of Swayambhuva Manu, but due to being insulted at the instance of his step-mother, he decided to leave home. On the advice of his birth mother Suniti Devi, Dhruva left for the forest in search of Lord Krishna, whom his mother said was the only person who could help him to remove his feelings of hurt and also fulfill his desires.

By the will of providence, the great sage amongst the demigods Shrila Narada Muni, came to know that the five year old Dhruva had left his father's palace to live in the forest. Therefore, Narada Muni went to meet Dhruva to enquire from him the reason for his leaving his father's opulent kingdom in exchange for a life of solitude and penance in the forest. On hearing that Dhruva had been badly insulted and wanted to achieve a kingdom that would be far greater than even his father's own great kingdom, Narada was very surprised that a mere boy of only five years of age could posses such a powerful *ksatriya* spirit. Narada was also moved by the child's sincerity and was extremely pleased that Dhruva was determined to

meet the Supreme Lord directly in order to achieve his heart's desire. Narada Muni advised Dhruva to go to the Madhuvana forest and perform austerities there, as he would very quickly achieve the desired result. Narada also gave Dhruva a very powerful mantra by which he could propitiate the Lord directly. The mantra given by Narada to Dhruva was *"Om namah bhagavate vasudevaya."*

That a little boy of only five year of age was engaged in such severe forms of penance, like standing on only one leg and subsisting only on air, the Supreme Lord Vishnu became very pleased with the sincerity and devotion of Dhruva Maharaja, and appeared before him in His four armed Narayana feature known as Lord Prishnigarbha. After hearing the heartfelt prayers of Dhruva, the Lord awarded the child the highest benediction of pure devotional service and liberation from repeated birth and death. The Lord also granted Dhruva a kingdom far greater than any earthly kingdom including that of his father, and appointed him as ruler of the localized Vaikuntha planet known as Swetadwipa, which is also called the Pole Star.

On top of the hill known as Dhruva Tila, where Dhruva performed austerities, is a temple known as the Dhruva-Narayana Mandir, where two important shrines can be seen. One shrine contains the deity of Lord Vishnu in His merciful feature as Prishnigarbha, also called Dhruva-Narayana, giving His blessings to Dhruva, who is seen offering his obeisance's to the Lord's lotus feet. Also present in the same shrine is Shrila Narada Muni, as well as Garuda, the eagle carrier of Lord Narayana. In the second shrine are the deities of Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Narayana, along with a deity of Shri Nathaji and Lord Krishna's dear friend Uddhava.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana, follow the same directions for Madhuvana as far as the Maholi junction, but after turning right at the Jai-gurudev Mandir, proceed ahead for just 1 km, taking a left turn at the F.C.I. Warehouse Complex then follow a narrow lane for about 300mt until reaching the gate leading up to the Dhruva-Narayana Temple situated on the nearby hillock. If proceeding from Krishna-kunda, one should return back through Maholi Village up to the F.C.I. Warehouse complex and turn right. Alternatively, from Krishna-kunda, one can join the Madhuvana *parikrama* path at the back of the *kunda* and proceed across the fields for about 1km to Dhruva Tila and the temple of Dhruva-Narayana. (see map no. 8)

B.5 **Madhu Gufa (Cave)**

This is said to have been the cave *(gufa)* where the demon Madhu once lived when he ruled the Madhuvana forest. It is also said that Madhu's son Lavanasura also lived in the same cave. Local people say that this cave goes underground for a few miles, but because the cave, over the period of many years, is continually shrinking, it is now far too narrow and dangerous to venture inside. Many demons preferred to make their homes in deep labyrinthine caves with a number of exits for easy escape in case of being attacked. There is now a shrine in the cave entrance dedicated to the monkey-god Hanuman. According to the Ramayana, the Madhu demon built a city at Madhuvana known as Madhu Puri, which was later inherited by Madhu's son Lavanasura.

How To Get There: This cave is at the foot of Dhruva Tila just 20mt. from the entrance gate leading up to the Dhruva-narayana Mandir (see map no. 8)

BM.7 **TALAVAN (Tarsi)**

Talavana is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja. It was in the Talavana forest that Lord Balarama killed the demon Denukasura, who was living there in the form of a wild ass along with his family and friends. Unfortunately, at the present time the forest has completely disappeared and only a few *tal* trees remain of what was once a large forest. The present name of this place is Tarsi, or sometimes Tarasi, and a fairly large village has now come up where the forest once stood. The important places to see here are the temple of Lord Balarama known as the Dauji Mandir and the Sankarshana-kunda.

As the name suggests, Talavana was a forest of *tal* trees, which is a type of palm that grows very tall and bears an extremely sweet and delicious fruit about the size of a grapefruit. The soft fleshy pulp of the *tal* fruit is saturated with a thick syrupy juice that tastes just like nectar. Because these wonderful fruits were of such high quality, King Kamsa ordered Denukasura to live at Talavana and protect the fruits from being plundered by

others. King Kamsa firmly believed that all the delicious *tal* fruits in Talavan forest were meant only for his pleasure. In his previous life, Denukasura had been known as Sahashika, the son of Bali Maharaja, who himself was the son of Virocana, the son of Prahlada Maharaja. Once upon a time, Sahashika went to the Gandhmadana Mountain in the heavenly realm to sport with beautiful young girls. Unfortunately, Sahashika accidentally disturbed the great sage Durvasa Muni who was meditating in a cave on the mountain. In a sudden rage, Durvasa cursed Sahashika saying; "Oh ass-like fool, go to earth and become an ass." After hearing the terrible curse pronounced by Durvasa, Sahashika begged Durvasa Muni for forgiveness. Being somewhat pacified by the humble submission of Sahashika, Durvasa told him that in the Dwarapa-*yuga*, the Supreme Lord will appear on earth in the form of the divine brothers Krishna and Balarama, and by Their mercy he would eventually be redeemed.

The Liberation of Denukasura

One day, Krishna and Balarama were enjoying pastimes in the forest of Vrindavana along with their cowherd boyfriends. As the brothers lay beneath the shade of a tree, their friends began to massage their legs and started fanning them with bunches of leaves. At that moment, a gentle breeze started blowing which carried the sweet aroma of newly ripened *tal* fruits that emanated from the nearby forest of Talavan. Upon smelling the delectable aroma of the newly ripened *tal* fruits, the cowherd boys began thinking how nice it would be to eat all those delicious fruits along with Krishna and Balarama. The cowherd boys knew that the nectar-filled fruits in Talavana forest were carefully guarded by a demon named Denukasura. Due to fear of the giant ass-demon Denukasura and his demonic friends, no one dared to enter the Talavana forest, not even birds or animals went anywhere near the place.

Desiring to enter the Talavana forest to eat the fresh *tal* fruits there, the cowherd boys headed by Shridama, Sudama and Stokakrishna began to address Krishna and Balarama, by first glorifying them for their heroic exploits in killing a large number of demons, simply by the power of their immensely strong arms. In fact, the boys went as far as

to say that only Krishna and Balarama were strong enough to kill the demon Denukasura, after which they could enjoy eating the ripened *tal* fruit. Upon hearing the request of the cowherd boys, Krishna and Balarama decided to enter the Talavana forest and kill the demon Denukasura. Leaving immediately, the two transcendental brothers soon arrived at Talavana, and accompanied by their friends entered the forest. Ripened *tal* fruits not only hung down in great abundance from all the tree tops, but also lay scattered all over the forest floor. The sweet and aromatic aroma of all the delectable fruits filled the air in all directions.

Balarama, exhibiting the strength of an elephant, immediately started yanking on one tree after another, causing all the ripened fruits to fall to the ground making a tumultuous sound. The loud noise caused by all the falling *tal* fruits startled Denukasura, who was resting nearby with his family members and friends. Neighing very loudly and in an angry mood, Denukasura immediately came to see what was causing all the noise. As the giant ass-demon hastily ran through the forest, the earth began to shake and the trees swayed 'to and fro' as if an earthquake was about to strike, and within moments the gigantic ass-demon arrived on the scene. Seeing that Balarama was the main cause of all the commotion, Denukasura suddenly charged towards Him at great speed digging up the earth with his hooves while sending clumps of dirt flying in all directions. Arriving in front of Balarama, the ass-demon swiftly whirled around and began violently kicking Balarama's strong chest with all his might while roaring loudly. At first Balarama seemed not to feel the kicking off the giant ass-demon, but then, without warning, Balarama suddenly caught hold of the ass-demon's hind legs and began to whirl him around over his head, as if the demon was nothing more than a rag-doll. Balarama then whirled the demon around with such power, that the demon's life air was immediately forced out from his body and he died instantaneously. Balarama then hurled the ass-demon's body up into the highest palm tree around, causing the tree to come crashing down under the weight of the demon's dead body, bringing down many other trees along with it, just like a pack of cards. It appeared as if a great tornado had just ripped straight through the Talavana forest. Thus the curse of Durvasa Muni had been fulfilled and just as Durvasa had said, the demon Denukasura achieved liberation.

Seeing that their friend Denukasura had been killed, all the ass-demons came out of the dense forest and immediately started to attack Krishna and Balarama. One by one, the two transcendental brothers caught the ass-demons by their hind legs and began whirling them around over Their heads and then threw them up into the trees. Within a short time, all the demons had been killed and their dead bodies lay suspended in the treetops appearing like clouds of various colors. Thanks to Krishna and Balarama, the cowherd boys were able to enjoy all the tasty *tal* fruits to their hearts content.

How To Get There: From Madhuvana, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama goes overland by a farm track to the sacred forest of Talavana situated just a few kilometers to the south. From Vrindavana, one must proceed 6km to Chattikara and then turn south-bound on the Delhi to Agra road (National Highway No.2) and proceed about 14km to the Bharatpur junction and then turn right on the Bharatpur road. (This turn is on a flyover and one must go past the turn-off and come back on the other side of the road). Proceed along the Bharatpur road for 6km until to reach the Tarsi road junction on the right. Turn right over the railway lines and proceed another 2km to Tarsi village. Then go straight through Tarsi village for another 2km to reach Sankarshana-kunda and Talavana. (see map no. 9)

Places of Interest At Talavana

T.1 Sankarshana-kunda

This very large lake is known is commonly known as Sankarshana-kunda, but is also known as Baladeva-kunda as well as Balabhadra-kunda. The various names of the *kunda* refer to Lord Balarama who killed the Denukasura demon here at Talavana. It is said that while herding cows in the Talavana forest, Lord Krishna created this *kunda* by striking His cow-herding stick into the ground so that the cowherd boys and cows could quench their thirst. The local people usually refer to this lake as Talavana-kunda or Tarasi-kunda.

How To Get There: (see map no. 9)

T.2 **Baladeva Mandira (Dauji Mandira)**

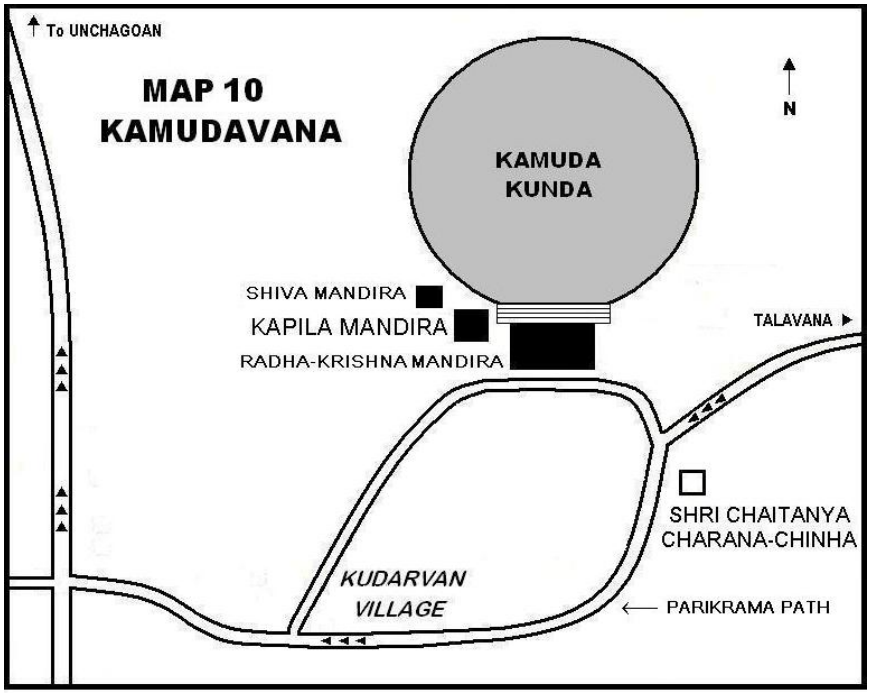
This ancient temple is dedicated to Lord Balarama who killed the Denukasura demon here at Talavana. Within the temple can be seen Lord Balarama along with His eternal consort Shrimati Revati Devi. This temple is known locally as Dauji Mandira. The word Dauji means elder brother and refers to Lord Balarama, Krishna's elder brother.

How To Get There: (see map no. 9)

BM.8 **KAMUDAVANA (Kudarban)**

Kamudavana is the smallest of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja with a *parikrama* of just one and a half kilometers. The sacred forest has now completely disappeared and a small village now stands here where the forest once stood. The village is known locally as Kudarban which is a corruption of the name Kamudavana. The word *'kamuda'* or *'kamudini'* refers to a special variety of lotus flower, similar to a water lily, which formerly grew in great abundance in Kamuda-kunda, and because of these *kamuda* flowers, this sacred forest achieved its name. The celebrated lake of Kamuda-kunda is still present here although somewhat reduced in size. It is said that Radha and Krishna used to enjoy many wonderful water sports *(jal-vihara)* in this sacred lake. The word '*jal*' means 'water' and '*vihara*' means 'pastimes', and because of these *jal-vihara* pastimes took place here in this lake, it is also known as Vihara-kunda.

The great sage and incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Kapila Muni, also spent considerable time at Kamudavana performing austerities on the banks of Kamuda-kunda, and there is a small temple here on the bank of the *kunda* containing the deity of Kapila. Because Kapila Muni spent time here engaged in meditation and austerities, this *kunda* is also known as Gangasagara-kunda, after the famous *ashrama* of Lord Kapila situated at the mouth of the Ganges in Bengal, known as Shri Gangasagara. In the *Adi-varaha Purana* it is said. **"One who bathes in this *kunda* will achieve ten times the benefit of a pilgrimage to Shri Gangasagara."** This famous *kunda* is also referred to as Padma-kunda and it is said that anyone who bathes here will acquire all the knowledge of the Vedas. The word *'padma'*



generally means a 'lotus flower' but can also refer to enlightenment through transcendental knowledge.

Krishna and Balarama used to regularly bring their cows to Kamudavana and while the cows were grazing in the forest, the two brothers would enjoy water sports in this *kunda* along with their cowherd boyfriends. Sometimes the cowherd boys would make beautiful garlands from the *kamuda* flowers that grew in the lake and then present them with great love and affection to Krishna and Balarama. There is also a small shrine here known as *charana-chinha* near the banks of the *kunda*, where impressions of the lotus feet of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu are being worshiped. The shrine commemorates Lord Chaitanya's historic visit to Kamudavana during His *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala in the year 1515.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana proceed 6km to Chhatikara and turn left (south-bound) on the Delhi to Agra road (National Highway No2) and proceed about 10km to the Sonk junction. Turn right down the Sonk road for about 8km until you reach the Unchagram junction. Then turn left and proceed for 2km up to the Kudarban road junction andthen turn left up to Kudarban village 300mt ahead. Proceed for another 50mt straight through the village to reach Kamuda-kunda. (see map no. 10)

BM.9 DATIHA (Datiya)

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Lord Krishna killed the demon Dantavakra here at Datiha, which is considered to be one of the gateways to the city of Mathura. This place is also known as Dati-upavana and according to the *Padma Purana*; it is one of the sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama. There are no actual pastime places to be seen here but there is a very old Yugala-kishore Mandira in the village.

How To Get There : From Vrindavana go to Chhatikara and turn left on to the Delhi to Agra road (National Highway No.2) and proceed about 9km to the Govardhana road junction. Turn right on the Govardhana road proceeding for another 6km until you reach the Datiya road junction then turn right and proceed for 1km to Datiya village. (see map no. BM 84)

The Killing of Dantavakra

Dantavakra was the king of Karusa, which is said to have been situated in the southern province of Kalinga which was in modern day Orissa, although there was also an ancient kingdom called Kurusa near Kashi (Varanasi). The *Puranas* reveal that Dantavakra was Krishna's cousin, but unfortunately due to his envious and demoniac nature, right from his very birth, he was envious of Krishna and bore Him great enmity throughout his life. After the death of his friend Sishupala at the hands off Krishna, Dantavakra was very upset; but when Krishna killed his most dear friend Salva, the king of Kashi, Dantavakra became furious and in order to avenge his friend's death, he took a solemn vow that he would kill Krishna.

By the will of providence, Dantavakra received news that Krishna was arriving from Dwaraka to meet all the *Vrajavasis* in Vrindavana and therefore Dantavakra immediately rushed to Datiha in order to challenge Krishna to a fight. The foolish Dantavakra was so furious and overcome with rage that he forgot his chariot, his bow, his armor, and even his helmet, and hurriedly rushed onto the battlefield with only his club. Charging towards Krishna and roaring like a lion, Dantavakra swung his club and struck Krishna with a powerful blow on the head, but Krishna did not seem to feel the blow. Taking His celebrated club the Kaumadaki, Krishna immediately struck Dantavakra's chest with such force that the heavy blow caused Dantavakra's heart to split in two, and while vomiting blood and shaking violently, he fell to the ground dead. It is also said that Dantavakra's younger brother named Viduratha, seeing the death of his older brother, immediately rushed onto the battlefield to challenge Krishna, but by using His celebrated *chakra*, Krishna immediately severed Viduratha's head from his body.

After killing the demon Dantavakra and his brother Viduratha, Krishna met with Nanda Maharaja and some of the V*rajavasis* who had been waiting for His arrival near Datiha. Krishna then crossed the Yamuna River and accompanied them to Mahavana forest where He met with mother Yashoda and other relatives and friends. He also met with Radharani and the *gopis* as well as the cowherd boys, thus fulfilling the promise He had made to them in Kurukshetra, during the occasion of the solar eclipse, that in the near future

He would return to Vrindavana and meet them all once again. It is said that when Nanda Maharaja arrived back in Vrindavana from Kurkshetra, he did not return to his home at Nandagrama, but moved back to the Mahavana forest and according to Shrila Jiva Goswami, Nanda Maharaja established his residence in the village of Gauravai (Gorai) near Gokula.

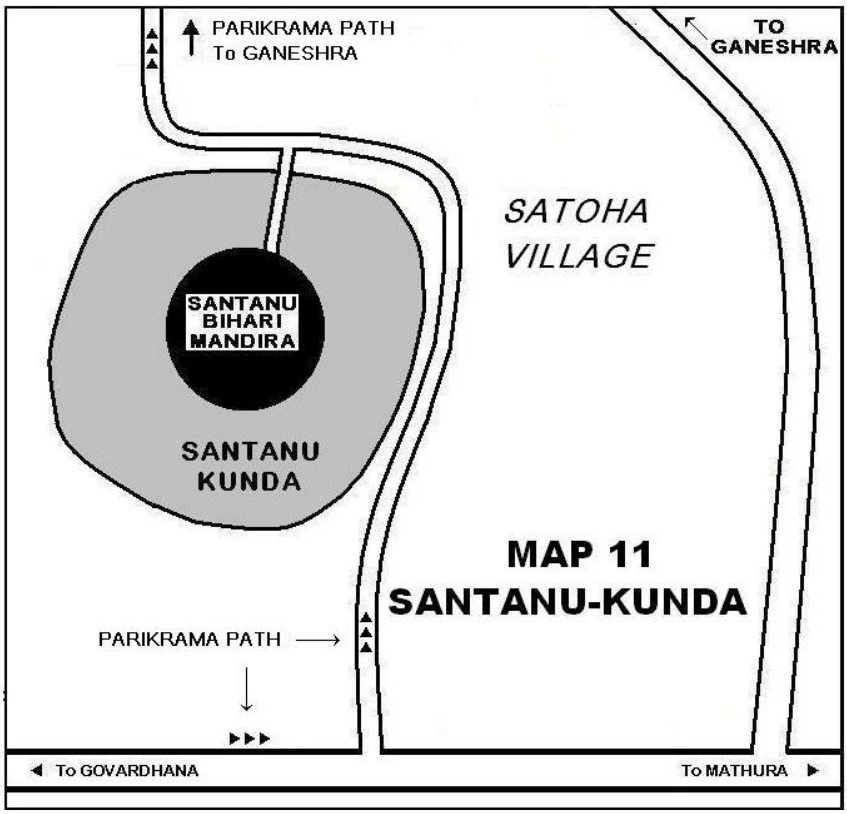
BM.10 **SHANTANU-KUNDA (Satoha)**

This is one of the *kundas* where Krishna and Balarama used to bring their cows to drink water. While the cows drank water from the *kunda* and rested under the shade of the trees, Krishna and Balarama would play various games with their friends on the banks of the Shantanu-kunda.

How To Get There : From Vrindavana go to Chhatikara and turn left on to the Delhi to Agra road (National Highway No.2) and proceed about 9km to the Govardhana road junction. Turn right on the Govardhana road proceeding for another 6km until you reach the Datiya road junction then turn right and proceed for 1km to Datiya village. (see map no. 11)

The Story of King Shantanu of Hastinapura

The *kunda* is named after Shantanu Maharaja, the King of Hastinapura. This famous *kunda* is formed in the shape of a moat that surrounds a small hill where it is said King Shantanu performed penance and also worshiped the sun god, Surya-Narayana, in order to get a worthy son who would be unequaled in the world. After returning to his kingdom, King Shantanu married the river goddess Ganga Devi, who gave birth to a son named Devarata, who later became celebrated as the great devotee Bhishmadeva. Soon after the birth of Devarata, Ganga Devi left King Shantanu and returned to her residence in the river.



Being the son of King Shantanu, Devarata was automatically the heir to the throne of Hastinapura, but for the sake of his father's happiness, he decided to give up his claim to the kingdom. After the departure of his first wife Ganga Devi, Shantanu Maharaja fell in love with an extremely beautiful girl named Satyavati, who was the daughter of a fisherman living near

Mathura named Dasaraja. (Satyavati had formerly given birth to Shrila Vyasadeva from the semen of Parashara Muni). Before agreeing to allow his beautiful daughter to marry King Shantanu, in order to satisfy his own personal ambition, Dasaraja demanded that his daughter's first born son should be made the king of Hastinapura, instead of Devarata. Shantanu's heart almost shattered when he heard the demand made by the fisherman and with a heavy heart returned to Hastinapura.

After seeing the forlorn and dejected condition of his father, Devarata went to meet the fisherman Dasaraja to find out what was the problem with the marriage arrangements. On hearing the demand of the fisherman, Devarata immediately agreed to give up his claim to the throne for the sake of his father's happiness. Nevertheless, the wily old fisherman told Devarata that even if he himself gave up the claim to the throne, once Devarata married, his sons would certainly lay claim to the throne in the future. On hearing this, Devarata immediately declared that he would never get married and would instead take the strict vow of celibacy, preferring to remain instead as a life-long *brahmachari*. As soon as Devarata made his declaration of life-long celibacy, the demigods began to shower flowers from the sky while chanting the words, "*Bhishma! Bhishma! Bhishma! "* This term *Bhishma* is used to glorify someone who has taken a very great vow. Upon hearing the vow taken by Devarata, Dasaraja the fisherman immediately agreed to give his daughter Satyavati in marriage to King Shantanu. From that day onwards, Devarata became known by the name Bhishma, and is still revered even today as one of the foremost Vedic authorities that has ever lived and is known as one of the twelve Mahajanas. The title of Mahajana refers to a very great personality who knows the import of the Vedic literatures.

Even today, it is still a popular tradition amongst *Vrajavasis*, who do not have children, to take a bath in Shantanu-kunda and then climb the hill to offer *puja* at the Shantanu-bihari Mandira, while praying to be blessed with a good son or daughter.

BM.11 **GANDHESHWARA (Ganeshara)**

The present name of this village is Ganeshara, which is derived from the word Gandheshwara after the sacred pastime place known as Gandheshwara-kunda. The word *'gandha'* means 'scent' or 'aroma', and previously many fragrant flowers used to grow here from which scented oils were produced from the petals. When Krishna used to come here with his cows, after taking His bath in the *kunda*, the cowherd boys would apply His body with scented oils. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said. **"Look from a distance at this Gandheshwara-sthana, it is well known that Krishna applied scented oils at this place."** Besides the sacred *kunda*, there is a very ancient temple in the village containing a unique Shiva-*linga*, known as Ghandeshwara Mahadeva, which local people say was established by King Vajranabha.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Satoha, but 500mt before the right turn to Santanu-kunda, turn right at the Ratanlal Phoolkatori Devi School and proceed along a narrow lane for3km to reach Ganeshara village. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.12 **KHECHARI (Phainchari)**

The word *'khechari'* means a particular type of 'evil witch', who drinks the blood of humans and feasts on the flesh of small children. Such witches also possess mystic powers whereby they can fly in the sky at will. It is believed by some researchers that Putana was born here at Khechari and also lived in this village. However, local *panditas* strongly disagree with this and say that Putana was actually born at Mathura, and it was only her dead body that fell here after she was killed by Krishna. There is no actual scriptural evidence to support the theory that Putana was born here or lived in the village.

Putana was the sister of both Bakasura and Agashura, and like them was a devoted servant of King Kamsa. One day, the witch Putana was ordered by Kamsa to kill all the new-born babies in Vrindavana, just to make sure that the eighth child of Devaki, who Kamsa believed was still alive, would also be killed. By her mystic powers, Putana was able to disguise herself as a very beautiful woman and after smearing deadly poison on her nipples, she went about killing innumerable babies by feeding them milk from her poisoned breasts.

Eventually she arrived at the courtyard of Nanda Baba's house in Gokula where baby Krishna was lying on His cot. As she appeared very beautiful and looked highly exalted almost like a goddess, none of the ladies in the house including Yashoda, Rohini, or the nurses objected when Putana stepped forward to offer her breast milk to baby Krishna. Picking up Krishna and placing Him in her lap, Putana pushed her poisoned nipple into Krishna's mouth.

Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even when He appears on earth in the form of a small baby. Being the Super-soul of all living entities, He could perfectly understand the situation, and knowing that this evil witch had already poisoned hundreds of new-born babies, Krishna suddenly became very angry and while sucking the milk from Putana's breast, sucked out her very life air. Screaming loudly and writhing in pain, Putana the witch immediately fell down dead. It has been said that as she was falling her body suddenly changed back into its original demoniac form and immediately expanded up to a distance of twelve miles, with her head reaching as far as Khechari village. It is also said that as the great witch was falling down, Krishna caused her to fall outside of Gokula so that the village would not be destroyed and nobody would get hurt.

There is a small *kunda* on the outskirts of Khechari village known as Putana-kunda, where the body of Putana is said to have been burned. The presence of this *kunda* gives credence to the claim by the local *panditas* that Putana was not born here, but after being killed by Krishna, was burned at this place. The *Shrimad Bhagavatam* also confirms that Putana's body was burned by the *Vrajavasis* after her death.

How To Get There: From Ganeshara continue another 2km on the same road going north to Phainchari village. From Vrindavana one should follow the directions to Bati. From Bati go 2.5km southward on the road to Phainchari village. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.13 **BAHULAVANA (Bati)**

This is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja where Krishna and Balarama used to graze their cows while performing their daily *go-charana-lila* pastimes of herding the cows. The Bahulavana forest has a *parikrama* of about six kilometers making it one of the largest of the sacred forests. The places of interest here include Sankarshana-kunda, Mana-sarovara, Bahuladevi Mandira and the Yogamaya Mandir. The sacred forest of Bahulavana has all but disappeared and now a large village known as Bati can be found here where the vast forest once stood.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana go to Chhatikara and turn right on the Agra to Delhi road (N.H.2) and then immediately left on to the Radha-kunda road and proceed for 1.5km. Then turn left at the Bati junction (just after the railway lines) and proceed along the road for 3km to Bati Village On reaching Bati village, turn right just after the canal bridge and proceed for another 500mt to Sankarshana-kunda which is on the left. (see map no. 12)

How the Forest of Bahulavana Achieved its Name

The forest of Bahulavana gains mention in a number of ancient *Puranas* and is particularly associated with Bahula Devi, after whom the forest has been named, and who appeared in this forest in the form of a cow. The *Skanda Purana* says that Bahula Devi is the consort of Lord Shri Hari (Vishnu), but does not reveal much detail about her. Therefore, comparisons have been made between Bahula Devi and Bhumi Devi (mother earth), who is also referred to as the consort of Lord Shri Hari, and who also appears in the form of a cow.

To give further support that Bahula Devi, Bhumi Devi, and also Lakshmi Devi, are one and the same personality, we find the following *sloka* in the *Skanda Purana*. **"Bahula, the wife of Shri Hari always lives in this forest. Oh king, this place is always auspicious because Lakshmi resides here, always enjoying pleasure pastimes with Her husband. In Bahulavana there is Sankarshana-kunda and Mana-sarovara. Whoever takes bath here in the month of *Chaitra* is able to have *darshana* of Shri Hari with His consort Lakshmi."** This verse refers to Bahula as being non-different from Lakshmi Devi. The *Puranas* also say that Bhumi Devi resides with Her husband Lord Varaha on the southern petal of the lotus of Vraja, at the sacred place known as Saukara-puri, which also called Saukara-vateshwara (Batasar). Thus the *Puranas* equate Bhumi Devi as well as Bahula Devi, to be non-different from Lakshmi Devi, the wife and eternal consort of Lord Vishnu.

The Story of Bahula Devi

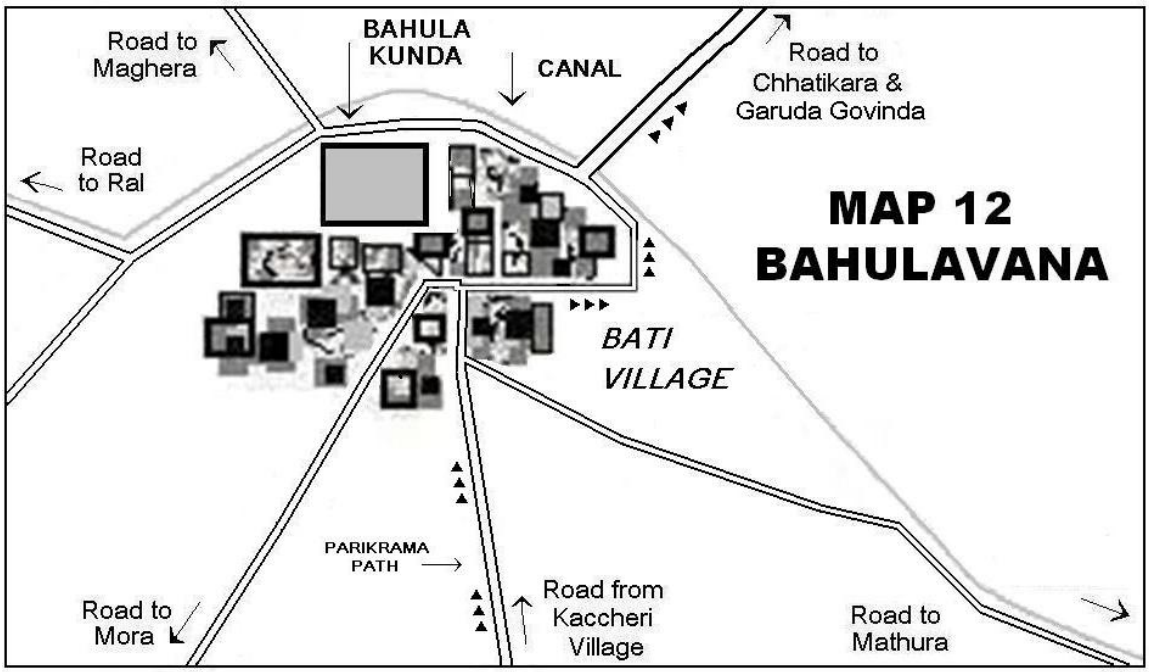
The story of Bahula Devi is recounted in a number of *Puranas* and in some versions the details of the story vary, but the essence of the story is the same. In the *Padma Purana*, it says that in her previous life, before attaining the position as the consort of Lord Shri Hari, Bahula had taken birth as a cow in the forest of Bahulavana, and her character was severely tested by the Lord Himself. One day, Bahula was taken to the pasturing ground by her master, a local *brahmana*, so that she could feed on the fresh grass of Bahulavana forest. Suddenly a very hungry tiger appeared from the jungle and was preparing to attack and eat Bahula. Seeing that the end was near, Bahula requested the tiger to wait just a moment so that she could feed milk to her hungry calf waiting nearby. Bahula promised to return as soon as the calf was fed. The tiger agreed to the proposal and waited for Bahula to return. Within a short time, after feeding her baby calf, Bahula returned as promised. To her amazement she found that the tiger had disappeared and Lord Krishna was standing there along with Yamaraja, who had appeared as the tiger just to test her truthfulness. Being pleased with Bahula's honesty, even in the face of death, Lord Krishna gave her the benediction that in her next life she would attain the position as one of the goddesses of fortune and achieve the Supreme Lord as her husband.

Places of Interest at Bahulavana

B.1 **Bahula Devi Mandira**

According to the local legend, a temple has stood at this spot next to the *kunda* since many hundreds of years. Inside the shrine one can see, carved in bass-relief, the deity of Bahula Devi in the form of a cow standing with her calf, and standing next to Bahula Devi is Lord Krishna along with Yamaraja, in the form of a tiger. Situated nearby to the Bahula Devi Mandir is a temple dedicated to Yogamaya Devi (Durga) and another temple dedicated to Lord Banki-bihari.

How To Get There: (see map no. 12)



B.2 **Sankarshana-kunda and Mana-sarovara**

Although Sankarshana-kunda and Mana-sarovara were at one time separate *kundas*, they have now been amalgamated into one *kunda* by those who excavated and cleaned the

kundas about fifty years ago and also constructed a *ghatas* around the perimeter. Formerly Sankarshana-kunda was situated next to the Bahula Devi Mandir and Mana-sarovara lay a little further away. Sankarshana-kunda is also known as Bahula-kunda, and Mana-sarovara is also known as Krishna-kunda, as well as Mana-sarasi. It is mentioned in the *Puranas* that one who takes bath here during the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) will achieve the *darshana* of Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Narayana.

How To Get There:(see map no. 12)

The Story of Mana-sarovara

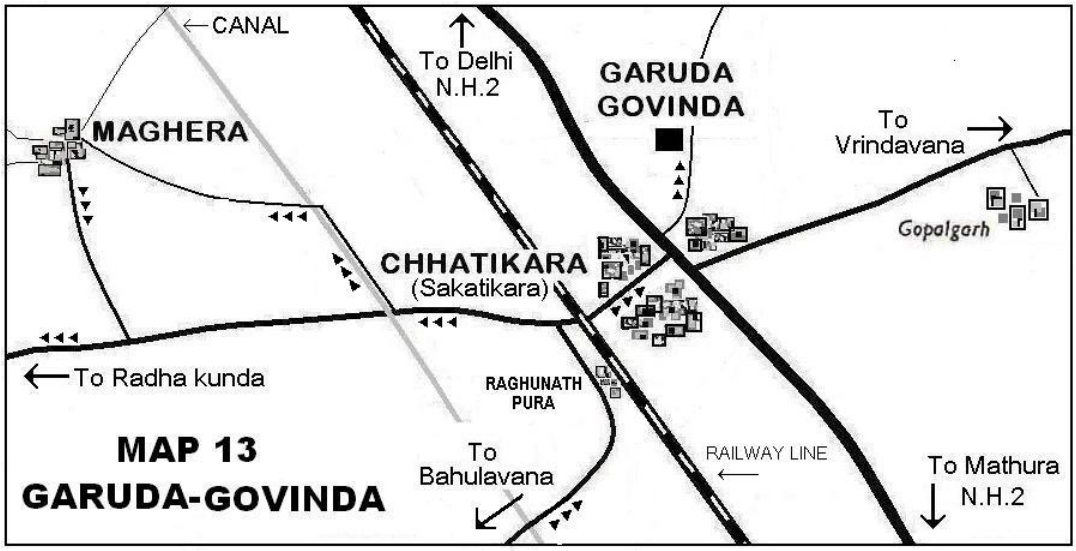
One day, when Radha and Krishna were enjoying Their transcendental pastimes near here, some incedent caused Radharani to suddenly experience a fit of jealous anger known as *mana (*pronounced *maan),* apparently due to some lover's misunderstanding. In an angry mood, Radharani came alone to Bahulavana and hid Herself in a bower next to this *kunda*. Feeling the intolerable pain of being separated from Radharani, Krishna began searching for Her everywhere and with the help of the *sakhis*, finally found Radharani sulking beneath a bower on the bank of this *kunda*. Krishna entered the bower and surrendered Himself at the lotus feet of Radha and after seeking forgiveness, was able to eventually pacify Radha's mood of jealous anger. The *kunda* where Radharani sat in an angry mood became celebrated as Mana-sarovara, the lake of jealous anger.

Lord Chaitanya Visits Bahulavana

It is mentioned in *Chaitanya-charitamrta* that during His *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala, when Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing through the forest of Bahulavana, all the cows that were grazing there, upon seeing the Lord, immediately surrounded Him and started mooing in chorus. At that moment, Lord Chaitanya became stunned due to feelings of ecstasy while remembering Lord Krishna's pastimes as a cowherd boy in the pasturing grounds of Vrindavana. The cows then started to lick the Lord's transcendental body and in return Lord Chaitanya began embracing each of the cows. Even wild deer came there and started licking Lord Chaitanya's body while innumerable peacocks assembled nearby and started dancing in ecstasy, thinking that Krishna had again appeared in the holy land of Vrindavana. After spending some time at Bahulavana, Lord Chaitanya continued His *parikrama* of Vrindavana. Some years later, Jahnavi Devi, the wife and eternal consort of Lord Nityananda, also visited Bahulavana while traveling from Vrindavana to Radha-kunda in the year 1582. It is said that she took bath in the sacred *kundas* before continuing on her journey to Radha-kunda.

BM.14 **GARUDA-GOVINDA / SHAKATIKARA (Chhatikara)**

The village of Shakatikara (Chhatikara) is famous for the temple of Garuda-Govinda and the place where Krishna enjoyed many of His boyhood pastimes along with His cowherd boyfriends. When Nanda Maharaja and all the inhabitants of Gokula were forced to leave their homes due to the disturbances created by various demons, they decided to move to the forest of Vrindavana on the western bank of the Yamuna River. After loading all their possessions onto bullock carts, they crossed the Yamuna near Bhandiravan and set up their camp at Shakatikara. It is mentioned in the *Puranas* that the forest of Vrindavana covered a vast area which also included Sakatikara. Some researchers believe that the name Shakatikara is derived from the word *'shakat'* which means 'cart' and the word *'kara'* means a 'half-circle' or 'circular'. In other words, Nanda Maharaja and the residents of Gokula placed their bullock carts in a circular shape to provide maximum protection to their families and livestock from wild animals and other predators while setting up their camp. When the residents of Gokula moved to Sakatikara, Vrishabhanu Maharaja, the father of Radharani, also decided to join his friend Nanda Maharaja in the great exodus from the area of Mahavana forest, and after crossing the Yamuna along with the residents of Gokula, set up his camp at a place called Vasati, just a short distance from Shakatikara. Krishna's arrival at Shakatikara marked the end of His *kaumara-lila,* or pastimes as a baby, and the beginning of his *pauganda-lila,* or boyhood pastimes.



It is believed that Shakatikara is the same place that is mentioned in *Bhakti-ratnakara* as being the holy place known as Shakat Rohana, which also called Shasthikaratavi, and is situated near to Garuda-Govinda *tirtha*. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"We have entered the place called Shasthikara, although previously it was known as Shasthikaratavi, and presently people call this place Shasthigara. It is a beautiful pleasant place and very dear to Krishna. Bumblebees are always humming in the forest of flowers. By bathing in the *kunda* here one will get supreme bliss."** The *Adi-varaha Purana* says. **"One and a half *yojanas* from Mathura is my supreme abode named Shakata Rohana. Many thousands of bumblebees live there. Whoever fasts for one night and then takes bath there is certain to attain happiness in Vidyadharaloka."**

How To Get There: From Vrindavana proceed 6km to Chhatikara, which is situated on the Delhi-Agra road. Continue northward along the Delhi-Agra road for 200mt then turn right for another 500mt to the Garuda-Govinda Temple. (see map no. 13)

The Garuda-Govinda Mandira

The most important place of interest at Shakatikara is the famous temple of Garuda-Govinda, which is believed to be around five thousand years old and is said to have been established by Vajranabha. The temple is located at the spot where Lord Vishnu's eagle carrier Garuda used to come to offer his prayers to Vrindavana. This was because of the curse given by Subhari Muni, that Garuda would immediately die if he ever came anywhere near the Yamuna. Due to this curse, Garuda was unable to enter the most confidential part of Vrindavana known as Seva Kunja where Krishna's *rasa-lila* pastime took place. Therefore, it is said that he used to come to Shakatikara and offer his prayers from this spot.

The following statement is found in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*. **"Look at this Garuda-Govinda, O Shrinivasa! Here Krishna performed wonderful pastimes, Shridama played Garuda and Govinda mounted His shoulders with a four-armed form. Garuda and Govinda looked very beautiful; therefore this place is named Garuda-Govinda."** During the time that Krishna lived at Shakatikara, He would come to this place with his cowherd boyfriends to enjoy various pastimes. One day while everyone was playing, Krishna's dear friend Shridama, Radha's young brother, suddenly manifested the same mood and form of Garuda. Upon seeing this wonderful manifestation, Krishna, to the great delight of all the cowherd boys, immediately manifested his form of Lord Vishnu known as Govindadeva and mounted the shoulders of Shridama and together they enjoyed pastimes as Garuda and Govinda. (This Vishnu form of Govindadeva or Govindaswami present in Vaikuntha, is different from Krishna's form of Govinda, the friend of the cows).

The Pastimes of Garuda-Govinda

Besides coming here to offer his prayers to Vrindavana, this place is also connected to another pastime concerning Garuda, when he received a very special *darshana* of Lord Krishna as Govindadeva. Just as Lord Brahma became confused about whether the little cowherd boy Krishna was actually the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Garuda also experienced a similar confusion. Previously, during the great battle of Lanka, Ravana's son Meghanath, who was expert in the black art of sorcery, was able to bind both Rama and Lakshmana with highly poisonous snake-ropes. Both brothers seemed almost on the verge of death when Narada decided to call for Garuda's help. As soon as Garuda arrived on the scene, the two poisonous snakes that were binding Rama and Lakshmana, upon seeing Garuda, the mortal enemy of all snakes, immediately ran in fear for their lives. At that moment, a very subtle doubt arose in Garuda's mind, as to whether or not Rama was in fact the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and if He was, why did He need the help of Garuda to save Himself from the snake-ropes.

Therefore, when Krishna was enjoying with His boyfriends at this place, Garuda came one day to offer his prayers to Krishna and momentarily became bewildered, just as Brahma had also been bewildered, as to how this little cowherd boy playing games along with His friends, could actually be the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Understanding Garuda's bewilderment, Krishna suddenly manifested His twelve-armed Vishnu form known as Lord Govindadeva. Upon seeing that form, Garuda's doubt was immediately dispelled and he fell down like a stick and offered his humble obeisance's to the Lord. When Garuda arose, Krishna in His form as Lord Govindadeva, mounted his shoulders just to satisfy him while giving him the benediction that the name of Garuda would be mentioned before the Lord's own name; hence this place became known as Garuda-Govinda.

About one hundred years after Krishna's disappearance, the King of Mathura, Vajranabha Maharaja, is said to have established this deity of Garuda-Govinda at Shakatikara to commemorate Krishna's pastimes that took place here. There is a famous festival held at this temple on the occasion of *akshaya-trityiya*, in the month of *Vaishakha* (April-May). On that day, the dress that normally conceals the deities' body is removed and one can have *darshana* of Lord Govinda's twelve arms as well as His lotus feet. On the altar of this temple standing next to Lord Govindadeva, one can see Goddess Lakshmi and the deities of Rukmini and Satyabhama. In order to take part in Krishna's pastimes at Dwaraka, Radharani manifested Herself as Princess Satyabhama and Chandravalli manifested herself as Princess Rukmini.

BM.15 **MAGHAHERA (Maghera)**

When Akrura was taking Krishna and Balarama to Mathura, the *gopis* followed Akrura's chariot from Nandagrama all the way to this village of Maghera, where they experienced feelings of unbearable pain and deep anguish at the thought of losing their beloved Krishna. At that time they all fainted and fell down on the ground as if they were dead. Some of the *gopis* even tried to block the passage of the chariot by throwing themselves on the road in front of it, as death itself would have been less painful than separation from Krishna. Nevertheless, it was ordained by destiny that Krishna would leave them behind and go to Mathura. Krishna's departure from Vraja marked the occassion when the *gopis* entered the period of their *vipralambha-bhava*, or divine love in separation from their beloved Krishna. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"Look at this village of Maghahera. The *Vrajavasis* simply stared down the road in the direction that Krishna went, their anguish was indescribable! Nowadays, people call this place Maghera."**

Although there are no particular places to visit here one can still see the ancient village of Maghahera, now called Maghera, which was the site of Krishna's final pastime with the *gopis* of Vraja. The word *'maghahera'* means 'to stare down the road'. This is the spot where the inhabitants of Vrindavana led by Radharani and the *gopis*, finally gathered to bid farewell to Krishna and Balarama who were being taken to Mathura on Akrura's chariot. Due to intense feelings of separation, all the *Vrajavasis* stood motionless like stones, and with unblinking eyes they kept staring down the road even after Krishna and Balarama had gone

out of sight. It is said that they were still standing there almost transfixed, even after the dust kicked up by the horse's hooves had long settled.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana go to Chhatikara and turn right on the Agra to Delhi road and proceed 100mt to the Radha-kunda road junction and turn left on the road to Radha-kunda and proceed for another 2km and then turn right at the roadjunction for Maghera and then go another 1km to Maghera village.(see map no. 13)

BM.16 **RAYA (Ral)**

This village is known by different names such as; Raola, Raya, Rai, Rar and Ral, and all of them are different forms of the word *'Raya'* which means 'Queen', and refers to Radharani, who is considered to be the '*Raya'* or 'Queen of Vrindavana'. In the *Padma Purana*, Raya is also called Raola, and it is mentioned to be one of the *upavans* or sub-forests of Vrindavana, and one of the places where Radharani performed many of Her childhood pastimes. After leaving Gokula, Nanda Maharaja made his camp at Sakatikara, and while Nanda's camp stretched westward from Shakatikara (Chhatikara) up to Raya, the camp of Radharani's father stretched eastward from Vasati (Basanti) to Raya, and both camps more or less converged at Raya. It has been said that during this period some fraternal members of Radha's family were staying at Raya and therefore Radharani spent part of Her *'pauganda-lila'* or Her 'girlhood pastimes' at this place.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana go to Chhatikara and turn a right on N.H.2 and then immediately left on to the road to Radha-kunda. Continue straight along the Radha-kunda road for another 6km to Ral, which is situated around 12km from Vrindavana. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.17 **JANATI (Junhedi)**

This is said to be the village of a *gopi* named Jasumati, who was an intimate and favorite *gopi* friend of Krishna. This village became known as Janati because of her. The name Janati, as well as Junhedi, are corrupted forms of the name Jasumati. There is a *kunda* in the village dedicated to Surya-narayana and two temples dedicated to Lord Krishna.

How To Get There: From Ral continue straight ahead on the Radha-kunda road for another 3.5km to reach Junhedi village. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.18 **VASATI (Basanti)**

After fleeing from their home in Mahavana along with Nanda Maharaja, Radharani's father Vrishabhanu and all the residents from Raval set up camp here at Vasati. The word *'vasati'* is derived from the words *'vasati sthapana'* which means 'we will reside here' or 'we will make our residence at this spot', and spoken by Vrishabhanu Maharaja when he reached this place. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Srinivasa, look at this Vasati Grama before us! Here King Vrishabhanu resided"**. It is said that Radharani spent part her childhood, from around the age of two and a half years, living with Her relatives at Raya, where she enjoyed the remainder of Her childhood pastimes or *kaumari-lila'.* It is also said that Radharani spent much of Her *'pauganda-lila'* or girlhood pastimes staying at both Vasati and Raya. She later moved with Her family to Varsana where Her *Kaisora–lila*, or pastimes of youth-hood took place. It was not until reaching Varsana that Her transcendental loving relationship with Krishna began to flourish.

In the village there was an ancient *raja kadamba* tree with the imprint of Radha's *mukut* or crown on its trunk. Also here in this village is the sacred Vasanta-kunda where, after they grew up, Radha and Krishna enjoyed the *rasa*-dance and performed their 'vernal' or 'spring-pastimes' called *'Vasanta-lila'*. On the first day of spring known as *'Vasanta-panchami'*, there are many festivals held in all the temples around Vraja to celebrate the special 'spring-time' pastimes of Radha and Krishna. Because of the celebrated Vasanta-kunda being situated in this village, the name of the village became changed to Vasanti and then to Basanti, as it is presently known today.

How To Get There: This place is 15km from Vrindavana. Follow the same directions for Ral, but continue for another 5km on the same road past Junhedi to Basanti, which is 2km before Radha-kunda. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.19 **MUKHARAI**

This village has been named after Shrimati Radharani's maternal grandmother Mukhara, who lived at this place and thus the village achieved its name of Mukharai. It is said that Mukhara used to take great transcendental pleasure in arranging secret meetings between Radha and Krishna, and every morning without fail, went to take *darshana* of the 'Divine Couple'. In the village one can see Mukhara-kunda, and the famous Mukhara Devi Mandira containing the deities of Radharani along with Her mother Kirtida, and Her grandmother Mukhara Devi. There is also a *bhajana-shila* here which is a hollow rock that sounds like a bell when struck.

How To Get There: This place is 1km past Basanti where one must turn left at the Mukharai junction (situated next to a culvert over a stream) about 1.5km before Radha-kunda. Turning left, follow this narrow lane for 1km to reach Mukharai village. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.20 **RADHA-KUNDA / SHYAMA-KUNDA**

The sacred lakes known as Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda are considered amongst the holiest places within the three worlds, because these two lakes were the most confidential bathing places of both Radha and Krishna. Radha-kunda was also the place where the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna would secretly meet every day to enjoy Their transcendental pastimes on the banks of the sacred *kunda*. In fact, Radha-kunda was one of the principle sites of the *ashta-kaliya-lila* or eight-fold daily pastimes that take place between Radha and Krishna and also one of the places where They performed the *rasa-lila*. There are six *rasa-mandalas* at Radha-kunda established by Narayana Bhatta that commemorate the *rasa-lila* pastimes. The *Puranas* also say that Radha-kunda is one of the important *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vraja and is known as Shrivana. The name Shri is another name of Radharani.

Sometime after the disappearance of Lord Krishna from the vision of the world, His great grandson, Vajranabha Maharaja, who was at that time the king of Mathura, excavated the sacred *kundas* and built stone *ghatas* around both Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda. Unfortunately, due to the long passage of time and the ever changing socio-political climate in India during the course of the following fifty centuries, these two sacred *kunda's* were eventually forgotten and within time became covered over and completely disappeared. Then in the early 16TH Century, the sacred lakes of Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda were rediscovered by the 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, during His historic *parikrama* around the twelve sacred forests of Vrindavana in the year 1515. Lord Chaitanya later sent His senior-most disciples in the form of the Six Goswamis to excavate Radha-kunda and all the other holy places connected to Lord Krishna's transcendental pastimes in Vraja Mandala that had taken place five thousand years earlier.

How To Get There: Radh-kunda is situated 24km from Vrindavana. To get there from Vrindavana first go to Chhatikara and turn a right on the Agra to Delhi road (N.H.2) and then immediately left on to the road to Radha-kunda. Continue straight along the Radha-kunda road for another 14 km to Radha-kunda. (see map no. 14)

The Slaying of Arishtasura and the Appearance of Radha-kunda

During the despotic reign of King Kamsa, the demon Arishtasura, who possessed the mystical form of a fierce bull, was one of the king's most trusted allies and was asked by Kamsa to kill the cowherd boy named Krishna. This was because on the day that Kamsa's sister Devaki was married, Kamsa heard a prophetic voice from the sky, informing him that the eighth child born of Devaki would one day kill him. The evil hearted Kamsa firmly believed that Krishna was in fact that eighth child. Consequently, on Kamsa's order, Arishtasura began searching for Krishna in all the pasturing grounds around Govardhana Hill and was creating great fear amongst the *Vrajavasis*, as he roamed around Vrindavana in a very angry mood. Hearing that the bull-demon Arishtasura was causing a great disturbance near Govardhana Hill, Krishna immediately went there along with His cowherd boyfriends to challenge Arishtasura. Coming before the gigantic demon, Krishna very nonchalantly stood there with His arm resting on the shoulder of one of His friends and in a loud voice, rebuked the demon with very sharp words which severely pierced Arishtasura's heart. Krishna then fearlessly challenged the bull-demon to fight.

Infuriated at being humiliated and challenged by a mere cowherd boy, Arishtasura immediately came towards Krishna in a very angry and aggressive mood. The bull-demon Arishtasura was so huge that he appeared just like a large mountain and his long swishing tail seemed to be touching the clouds. With a loud bellow and hot jets of steam shooting from his nostrils, the gigantic bull-demon began charging towards Krishna at great speed, digging up the earth with his hooves as he went. When the bull-demon got within reach, Krishna very cleverly caught the bull-demon by his horns and after whirling him around with great force, threw him at least one hundred meters, causing the demon to come crashing to the ground with a great bump and he momentarily lost consciousness. After regaining his senses, the bull-demon stood up, feeling somewhat disoriented and sweating profusely; the demon shook his head and once again charged towards Krishna. When Arishtasura got close enough, Krishna again caught the demon by the horns and lifted him high above His head, and after twirling him around, Krishna slammed him into the ground with such a force, the demon's eyes immediately bulged from their sockets. Lying in a crumpled heap on the ground, the bull-demon's legs began to shake violently and while simultaneously passing stool and urine, he died on the spot.

After Arishtasura had been slain, all the *Vrajavasis* came to congratulate Krishna on His heroic exploits. However, Radharani and the *gopis* saw an opportunity to have some fun and criticized Krishna for having killed a bull, the symbol of religion. The *gopis* informed Krishna that they would not associate with Him until He had purified Himself from the great sin of killing of a bull, saying that He would have to bathe in all the holy *tirthas* of the world in order to purify Himself of the sin. Although Krishna tried to explain that the bull was actually a great demon, the *gopis* were not interested in excuses. Therefore, accepting the verdict of the *gopis*, Krishna selected the largest hoof impression left behind after the titanic battle with the bull-demon and then enlarged the hole by stamping His heel into the ground. Krishna then called all the holy *tirthas* of the world to appear there before Him, which they immediately did. Krishna then ordered them to fill the hole with their sacred waters so that He could take bath and purify Himself from the sin of killing a bull.

As the *gopis* simply looked on in amazement, Krishna very happily took His bath in the water of all the holy *tirthas*. Then, in order to tease the *gopis*, Krishna began boasting about the sanctity and great beauty of His newly made *kunda*. Feeling stung to the quick by Krishna's boasting words, Radharani, not to be outdone, immediately broke one of Her bangles and using it to dig, got down on Her hands and knees and began digging Her own *kunda*, right next to Krishna's newly-made *kunda*. Seeing Radharani digging with Her broken bangle, the *gopis* also broke their bangles and also began digging in order to help Her. It was almost mid-night when the *gopis* finally finished digging and they immediately formed a human chain to bring water from Manasi-ganga in pots so they could fill the new *kunda* with water. At that moment, all the holy *tirthas* that had come there on Krishna's order, appeared before Radharani with folded hands, and begged Her to allow them to fill Her newly made *kunda* with their holy water, saying it would be the perfection of their lives if they could render some humble service Her. Being very compassionate, Radharani agreed to their proposal and the holy *tirthas* immediately broke through the banks of Krishna's *kunda* and poured their waters into the *kunda* dug by Radharani and the *gopis*. Krishna then came there and on the exact stroke of mid-night, He took His bath in Radha's new *kunda* while declaring that hence forth it would be known as Radha-kunda, saying that whoever bathed there with full faith and devotion, would automatically develop love for Radharani equal to His own love. Radharani then went to Krishna's *kunda* and while taking Her bath there, declared that its name would be Shyama-kunda, saying that anyone who bathed there with full faith and devotion, would automatically develop love for Krishna equal to Her own love.

Bahulashtami - the Appearance Day of Radha-kunda

The day on which Radha-kunda appeared in this world is known *Bahulashtami*, which means the eighth day of the waning moon. In this regard the word '*bahula*' refers to the 'dark fortnight' of the waning moon, also known as *krishna-paksha,* and '*ashtami'* means the 'eighth day'. Because Radha-kunda appeared on the stroke of midnight, hundreds of

thousands the pilgrims descend on Radha-kunda on the night of *bahulashtami* to take their sacred bath on the exact stroke of midnight. Therefore this night-time bath at Radha-kunda is called the *adiratri-snana* (mid-night bath) and it is the only *snana* or ritual bath in the whole world that is performed at midnight. In the *Padma Purana (Karttika Mahatmya)* it says. **"If a person takes bath in Radha-kunda on the day of *Bahulashtami* in the month of *Karttika,* they become very dear to Krishna."**

The Benefits of Bathing at Radha-kunda

The great spiritual benefit one achieves by simply bathing once in Radha-kunda is incomparable, but as Krishna has said, such bathing must be done with 'full faith and devotion' in order for such bathing to have its full transcendental effect. It is not that some sinful devil can simply take bath in the sacred *kunda* and immediately achieve divine love for Radharani, equal to that of Krishna Himself. That kind of sentimental assumption is not philosophically correct. Krishna's injunction is that those who bathe must also be properly qualified, or in other words, the bather must possess the qualification of complete faithfulness and devotion, which can only be achieved by the mercy of a bona-fide spiritual master and through the practice of pure devotional service.

The following verses from Vaishnava scriptures glorify the benefits obtained by bathing at Radha-kunda. **"One can immediately attain pure love of God by once bathing in Radha-kunda."** *Radha-kundastakam* – Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. **"Shri Krishna gives ecstatic love like that of Radharani to whoever bathes in Radha-kunda."** *Chaitanya-charitamrita* – Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami. **"A devotee will at once develop pure love of Krishna in the wake of the *gopis* if he once takes bath in Radha-kunda."** The Bhaktivedanta purport to *Upadeshamrita* says. **"Because these two lakes are manifestations of Radha and Krishna's divine love, those who bathe there are most fortunate, because bathing there is like bathing in the transcendental love of Radha and Krishna."** *Vraja-riti-chintamani* – Vishvanatha Chakravarty Thakura.

Taking Caution when Bathing at Radha-kunda

One of the most auspicious times for bathing at Radha-kunda is on Bahulashtami, the appearance day of Radha-kunda. Nevertheless, when one bathes in the sacred waters of Radha-kunda, one has to be extremely careful not to commit any offences. Radha-kunda is considered to be the liquid form of Radharani; therefore one must observe the proper etiquette in accordance with the Vaishnava scriptures. In the opinion of Shrila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, only those who are on the same spiritual level as Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, are fit to live at Radha-kunda and bathe in Her transcendental waters. Therefore, when bathing there, one must follow in Shrila Raghunatha's transcendental footsteps while emulating his mood of humility and servitude.

Bathing at Radha-kunda should be performed as a sacrificial offering to Radharani, with the same reverence as when worshiping the deity of Radha and Krishna in the temple. It is a Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, that when entering the sacred Radha-kunda to take bath, one should first put one's right hand into the water followed next by ones feet; this is because Vaishnavas do not enter the sacred *kunda* feet first. The same etiquette should also apply to Shyama-kunda. There are some Vaishnavas who even crawl on their knees into the *kunda* out of respect for Radharani. Some Vaishnavas, who are unwilling to enter the sacred *kunda*, scoop water in a *lota* or *kamandalu*, and pour it over their heads in order to bathe without committing any offence.

In 1936, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, the illustrious founder of the Gaudiya Matha, led a one- thousand strong *parikrama* party on the Vraja Mandala Parikrama. When they arrived at Radha-kunda, out of great reverence for the sacred *kunda*, they did not take bath, but simply sprinkled three drops of water on their heads, which, according to the Vedas, is equal to bathing, while at the same time showing the utmost respect for Radharani's sacred *kunda*.

In 1976, Shrila Prabhupada heard that a *parikrama* group of his junior disciples were frivolously joking around on the banks of Radha-kunda and jumping into the sacred lake as if

they were at a swimming pool or beach resort. Shrila Prabhupada became very upset saying, "There is no difference between Radha-kunda and Radharani, so how can they jump over Radharani? You cannot even touch your feet to Radha-kunda. You can take a little water on your head. This is showing respect to Radha-kunda.' Shrila Prabhupada also said regarding the offensive mentality of some devotees, 'Don't go to Radha-kunda simply to become a monkey in your next life".

On another occasion years later, a group of western female devotees clad in bikinis were seen jumping and splashing around in Radha-kunda as if they were on the beach at Goa. Such rank neophyte devotees should never go to such a holy places like Radha-kunda in the first place, as they are spiritually unfit due to their offensive behavior and irreverence towards Radharani. Such neophytes cannot reap the benefit of visiting such an exalted holy place; on the contrary, they will simply become degraded due to committing Dhama-*aparadha*. There is a very famous saying of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, regarding the rank neophyte devotees and *sahajiyas* who congregate at Radha-kunda, when he once said, "There are many *babajis* who come to Radha-kunda to live, but because of their grievous offences, they are not actually living at Radha-kunda, but at Naraka-kunda (hell)."

Pratibhu-murtis at Radha-kunda

In the year 1670, the Mughal tyrant Aurangzeb was planning an attack Vrindavana in order to destroy all the temples and desecrate all the deities. Fortunately, having received an advance warnings through spies employed in Aurangzeb's court by the Rajput princes, all the important deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis were smuggled out of Vrindavana in bullock carts and taken to Radha-kunda. It has been said that the deities were actually hidden in the *kunda* until the initial danger had passed. The deities spent a number of days at Radha-kunda, where they were worshiped daily by the local residents before being taken to Kamyavana, and then finally to Jaipura in Rajasthan. After the Gaudiya Goswami's deities left Radha-kunda, the local *Vrajavasis* and Vaishnavas felt great separation from them and therefore it was decided to establish replica temples containing the *pratibhu-murtis* or empowered expansions of the original Goswami deities. This also meant that residents of Radha-kunda could have *darshana* of the 'Seven Goswami Temples of Vrindavana', without having to leave Radha-kunda.

The Seven Goswami Temples at Radha-kunda

TEMPLE NAME	**ORIGINAL FOUNDER**
Radha Madana-mohana Mandira	Sanatana Goswami
Radha Govinda Mandira (Govindaji)	Rupa Goswami
Radharamana Mandira	Gopala Bhatta Goswami
Radha Damodara Mandira	Jiva Goswami
Radha Shyamasundara Mandira	Shyamananda Pandita Goswami
Radha Gokulananda Mandira	Lokanatha Goswami
Radha Gopinatha Mandira	Madhu Pandita Goswami

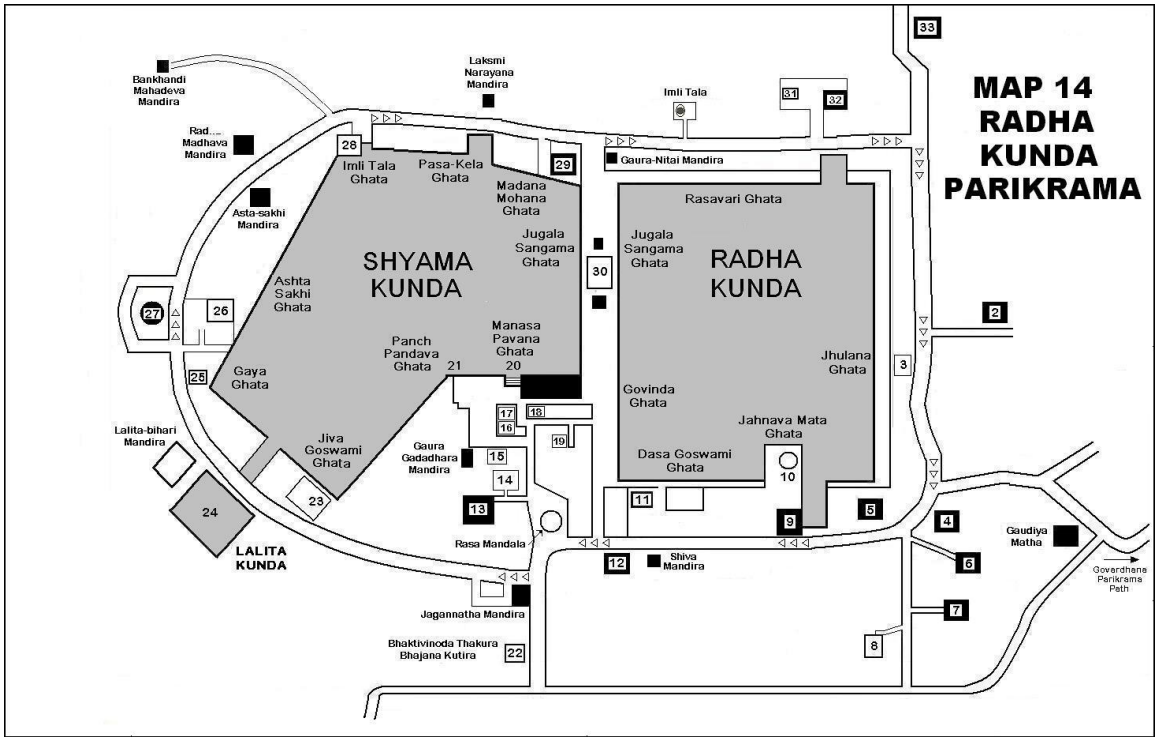
Other *prathibhu* deities of Gaudiya Vaishnavas at Radha-kunda:

Radha Kanta	Vakreshwara Pandita
Radha Vinoda	Lokanatha Goswami
Radha Madhava	Jaideva Goswami

Performing Radha-kunda Parikrama

The *parikrama* of Radha-kunda traditionally starts from Kundeshwara Mahadeva Mandira on the southern corner of the sacred *kunda*, but first one should offer one's humble obeisance's to Radharani in Her transcendental liquid form as Radha-kunda. One can also perform *achamana* and chant prayers glorifying Radha-kunda. Some Vaishnavas chant the *Radha-kundastakam* by Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. Alternately, one may simply chant the

Hare Krishna *maha*-mantra and sprinkle three drops of holy Radha-kunda water on one's head, which is simple and equal to all other rituals such as *achamana*. One can then start the *parikrama* of Radha-kunda beginning from the Kundeshwara Mahadeva Mandira.



START OF RADHA-KUNDA PARIKRAMA

R.1 **Kundeshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

It is a tradition that before circumambulating Radha-kunda, one first offers respectful obeisance's to Kundeshwara Mahadeva, while asking for his blessings in order to perform a successful *parikrama* around the two sacred *kundas*. Kundeshwara Mahadeva is the most famous temple of Lord Shiva in Radha-kunda and is one of the four *ksetra-palas*, the protecting deities of the sacred *kunda*, with Kundeshwara Mahadeva guarding the *kunda's* southern portion. The word '*pala'* means protector and '*ksetra'* means 'area'. The other *ksetra-palas* of Radha-kunda are Rameshwara (east), Mahadeva (north), and Ban-khandi (west). During the *rasa-lila* in Vrindavana, Lord Shiva arrived there in the form as a *gopi* and at that time Krishna gave him the name Gopishwara and asked him to protect the *gopis*, the *rasa-mandala*, and the entire Dhama of Vrindavana. Therefore one can see the *dig-pala* deities of Lord Shiva in all the important holy places around Vraja.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.2 **Radha Krishna Purana Mandira**

This is believed to have been the first temple established at Radha-kunda. The word '*purana*' means 'very old' or 'ancient'. During the first excavation of Radha-kunda undertaken by Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, a set of small deities of Radha and Krishna were discovered lying hidden in the mud. The deities were given to a local *brahmana* who began to worship these deities in a small room next to the *kunda*. These deities are considered by local Vaishnavas to be the presiding deities of Radha-kunda. Unfortunately, these deities were stolen by thieves many years ago, and replica deities referred to as the *pratibhu* expansions were installed in the temple. In the courtyard of this temple stood a banyan tree entwined with a *neem* tree, which in *Vrajavasi* folklore represents Jugala-kishore, the dual-form of the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.3 **Jhulana Sthali**

This is the spot on the banks of Radha-kunda where Radha and Krishna used to enjoy their swing pastimes known as *jhulana-lila*. The word '*jhula'* means a 'large swing' that can accommodate two or more persons at the same time. The site of the swing pastimes is marked by a concrete structure that looks like an upturned letter 'U'. There is also a banyana tree here which is the off-shoot of the original one said to have been planted at *jhulana-sthali* by Vajranabha Maharaja. The bathing *ghata* situated on this side of Radha-kunda is also known as Jhulana Ghata.

During the transcendental pastimes of *jhulana-lila* enacted by Radha and Krishna at this place, hanging down from the banyana tree was an amazing swing created by Vrinda Devi that was shaped like a lotus flower with sixteen petals. The 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna would sit on this lotus flower shaped swing and then the *ashta-sakhis* and *ashta-manjaris* would also sit on the same swing in a circle facing Radha and Krishna. Another group of *gopis* would then push the swing to and fro. Each of the *sakhis* and *manjaris* sitting on the swing would think that Radha and Krishna were looking directly at them, as they swung back and forth enjoying the *jhulana* pastimes in great transcendental ecstasy.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

(**Note**- the Radha Kunja-bihari Mandira, Shiva Khora, and Malyahari-kunda, have been included in the section Govardhana *parikrama* as they all fall on the Govardhana *parikrama* path)

R.4 **Gopala Manipura Mandira**

This temple was established around 1890, by the king of Manipura, Churachanda Maharaja, after he had a most unusual dream. In the king's dream, the deity of Bala Gopala worshiped by his family, appeared to him in his dream and requested that the king should build a temple for Him at Radha-kunda. The Gopala deity also told the king to build the temple in such a place that the deity would be able to have the *darshana* of the sacred Radha-kunda, and also have *darshana* of the rising sun. The king then went to Radha-kunda and built a large sandstone temple according to the specifications given to him in the dream by Lord Gopala. Therefore, this temple was built in the exact spot from the deity, while sitting on the *simhasan* inside the temple, has a clear view of Radha-kunda and simultaneously can see the sun rising at dawn over the sacred *kunda*, and in fact, the first rays of the rising sun falls directly on the deity of Lord Gopala.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.5 **Radha Kanta Mandira**

This temple was established by the followers of Vakreshwara Pandita who was a close associate of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This temple contains the *pratibhu* deities or Shri Shri Radha Kanta, the empowered replicas of the deities that were personally worshiped by Vakreshwara Pandita himself. The original deities of Radha Kanta are still being worshiped in a shrine next to the Gambhira, the room where Lord Chaitanya stayed at Jagannatha Puri. The *pushpa samadhi* of Vakreshware Pandita can also be seen here to the left of the deity room. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesa-dipika*, Vakreshwara Pandita was the *gopi* Tungavidya in Krishna's pastimes, and this temple stands on the actual site of Tangavidya Devi's personal *kunja* at Radha-kunda.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.6 **Radha Shyamasundara Mandira**

This temple contains the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Syamasundara and is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda. The original temple of Radha Syamasundara in Vrindavana was established by Shyamananda Pandita Goswami. The *pushpa samadhi* of Shyamananda Pandita can also be seen next to the deity room.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.7 **Radha Damodara Mandira**

This temple contains the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Damodara and is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda. The original temple of Radha Damodara in Vrindavana was established by Shrila Jiva Goswami.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.8 **Shrinivasa Acharya Kunja**

This is the place where the great Vaishnava devotee Shrila Shrinivasa Acharya used to stay and where he would perform his *bhajana* when visiting Radha-kunda, his *baithaka* or sitting place can also be seen in this small *kunja* (garden). Shrinivasa used to worship a small deity of Krishna named Jhula Thakura. The deity received the name Jhula Thakura because Shrinivasa always kept the deity in his bead bag. The word '*jhula*' means 'bag' and *'thakura'* means 'most worshipful person'. A temple was established in Vrindavana at Dhira Samira near the Gopishwara Mahadeva Mandira, where Shrinivasa performed *bhajan* and where his deity is still being worshiped. Shrinivasa Acharya was a disciple of Gopala Bhatta Goswami and was a member of the famous 'troika' of Jiva Goswami's *siksha* disciples that included Shyamananda Pandita and Narottama Dasa. Shrinivasa Acharya and Narottama Dasa were also part of the famous *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala led by Raghava Pandita Goswami that retraced the original *parikrama* route taken by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Shrinivasa Acharya, along with Shyamananda Pandita and Narottama Dasa, were also members of the first book distribution party sent by Jiva Goswami to Bengal for distributing the books of the Six Goswamis. Besides the *baithaka* of Shrinivasa, there is also a small shrine containing the deities named Radha Madhava. Shrinivasa Acharya wrote the famous prayers glorifying the Six Goswamis of Vrindavana known as the *Shri Shri Sad-goswami-ashtaka*. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Shrinivasa Acharya was Mani Manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.9 **Radha Gopinatha Mandira**

This is not one of the Goswami temples of Radha-kunda but was established by the followers of Jahnava Mata, the wife of Lord Nityananda, after her visit to Radha-kunda in 1582. While staying at Radha-kunda, Jahnava Mata would regularly sit under a tree the banks of the sacred *kunda* and chant *japa*. While she was immersed in chanting the holy names of the Lord, she suddenly heard the sound of Krishna's flute, and turning her head, she had the transcendental vision of Lord Gopinatha standing beneath a nearby *tamal* tree in a three-fold bending form (*tri-bhanga-rupa*) playing on His flute. The followers of Jahnava Mata decided to establish a temple on the very spot where she had the vision of Lord Gopinatha. In the temple one can see the deity of Lord Gopinatha with Radharani standing on the right-hand side of Lord Gopinatha, and with Ananga Manjari on the right. Normally, Radharani stands on Krishna's left, but in all Gopinatha temples, Radharani is on the right and Her sister Ananga Manjari on the left.. (The story explaining this unusual arrangement is explained in the section of this book under the heading - Radha Gopinatha Mandira, Vrindavana)

When she arrived at Radha-kunda, Jahnava Mata met Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, Krishnadasa Kaviraja, and Gopala Bhatta Goswami. At that time Raghunatha Dasa was in a very pitiable condition feeling acute separation from both Rupa and Sanatana, whose association he deeply missed since the time of their disappearance. In Vrindavana, Jiva Goswami had requested Jahnava Mata to visit Radha-kunda just to give her divine *darshana* to Raghunatha Dasa, in order to give him some relief from the raging fire of separation, while hoping that it would give him impetus to go on living. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"That illustrious personality, Ma Jahnava, glowed with a golden effulgence more brilliant than the sun. When Raghunatha Dasa Goswami saw her coming, he went mad out of ecstatic love. He cried so much that due to the sudden flood of tears that filled his eyes,**

he momentarily lost sight of her. Ma Jahnava could understand by her spiritual vision, the innermost feelings within the heart of Raghunatha Dasa. Tears of divine love poured forth from both their eyes just like well springs. Raghunatha Dasa did not know what to say, or how to please Ma Jahnava, whose own heart was burning in the fire of separation from her beloved husband and eternal consort Lord Nityananda".

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.10 **Ma Jahnava Baithaka / Ma Jahnava Ghata**

This is the place on the banks of Radha-kunda where Lord Nityananda's eternal consort Shrimati Jahnava Mata would sit every day to chant *japa* during her stay at Radha-kunda. The word '*baithaka'* means 'sitting place'. Next to the *baithaka* is the place where Jahnava Mata would bathe in the sacred *kunda*, the *ghata* was later named as Ma Jahnava Ghata. It is interesting to note that the exact spot where Jahnava Mata sat is the very location in Krishna's pastimes, where a crystal staircase leads to the personal *kunja* of Ananga Manjara which is situated in the centre of Radha-kunda. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Jahnava Mata appeared as Ananga Manjari, the younger sister of Radharani in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes. Another interesting fact is that when Lord Balarama desires to take part in Krishna's intimate pastimes with the *gopis*, he manifests Himself as Ananga Manjari.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.11 **Raghunatha Dasa Goswami Samadhi**

This is the *samadhi* of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, one of the most intimate followers of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who was affectionately known to all the Gaudiya Vaishnavas as Dasa Goswami. He was born in Bengal in 1494, as the son of a very wealthy landowner, but after hearing about the glories of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, his only desire was to surrender before Lord Chaitanya and serve His lotus feet. In order to keep him at home, his father got him married at an early age and also arranged for guards to watch over him. Nevertheless, Raghunatha had absolutely no interest in worldly affairs and made a number of abortive attempts to run away from home, hoping to join Lord Chaitanya and his followers in Jagannatha Puri. While still living at his father's house, he had the great fortune to meet Lord Nityananda, who ordered him to utilize his father's wealth and organize a great public feast at Panihati, where he was asked by the Lord to distribute many different varieties of *chira-dahi*, a preparation of yogurt, sugar, and flat-rice, mixed with various fruits, which was one of Lord Nityananda's favorite dishes. Thousands attended the feast and Lord Nityananda was so happy that he placed His lotus feet on Raghnatha's head and blessed him that he would soon achieve the association of Lord Chaitanya. The famous 'Chira-dahi Festival' of Raghunatha Dasa is still being celebrated every year at Panihati in West Bengal. At the tender age of nineteen, Raghunatha finally managed to escape after eluding his guards and was able to reach Jagannatha Puri where he surrendered before Lord Chaitanya. The Lord placed him under the care of His personal secretary Swarupa Damodara Goswami, who expertly trained Raghunatha in all aspects of Gaudiya Vaisnava philosophy and tradition.

Raghunatha Dasa remained at Jagannatha Puri serving Lord Chaitanya until the Lord's disappearance in 1534. After the Lord's departure from the world, Raghunatha Dasa went to Vrindavana to take shelter of Rupa and Sanatana Goswami, who immediately accepted him as their younger brother. Raghunatha was in such a distraught condition due to the loss of Lord Chaitanya's association, he was even contemplating suicide, by throwing himself from the top of Govardhana Hill. Rupa and Sanatana tried to console him, and because he had received a small Govardhana-*shila* and a set of Radha's favorite *gunja* beads, as a gift from Lord Chaitanya, Rupa and Sanatana suggested that he should take shelter of Govardhana Hill by performing *parikrama* every day and live at Radha-kunda, where he could render service to the sacred *kunda* so dear to Radha's heart.

Raghunatha Dasa remained at Radha-kunda for the rest of his life and became renowned amongst Lord Chaitanya's followers as the embodiment of renunciation. Raghunatha would chant at least one-hundred thousand holy names of Krishna on his *japa*

beads every day and would not sleep more than one or two hours. Raghunatha ate only enough to keep body and mind together and it is said that his observance of the regulative principles was so strict and unwavering, that it appeared that his regulative principles were etched in stone; as such lines can never be erased. It is said that after the disappearance of Lord Chaitanya, Raghunatha, experienced such acute separation that he stopped eating solid food, taking only fruit and milk. After the disappearance of Sanatana Goswami, his mood of separation increased and he took only a leaf-cup of buttermilk daily. But after the disappearance of Rupa Goswami, he gave up eating altogether.

Practically speaking Raghnatha Dasa, towards the end of his life, was so absorbed in pure Krishna consciousness, that he lost awareness of the material world and his external physical covering. He remained completely absorbed in the consciousness of being a m*anjari* serving at the lotus feet of Radharani. To illustrate his total absorption in *gopi-bhava*, there is a very well-known story about his rejecting a gift believing the giver of the gift was a servant (*sakhi*) of Radha's fierce rival Chandravali. One day, a devotee arrived with a leaf-cup of buttermilk for Raghunath Dasa. As Raghunatha held the leaf-cup in his hand, he suddenly noticed it was much larger than any of the regular leaf-cups he had seen. Feeling somewhat suspicious about the gift-bearing devotee, he asked from where this very large leaf-cup had come. When the devotee replied that the leaf-cup was brought from a village named Sakhisthali, which was the village of Chandravali, in a sudden fit of jealous anger, Raghunath threw the leaf-cup far away, saying that he would have nothing to do with Chandravali, her village, or any of her *sakhis*. The devotee immediately went away in great ore of Raghunatha, feeling extremely blessed to have witnessed Raghunatha's intense mood of love and devotion for Radharani.

After having spent more than forty years performing *bhajana* at Radha-kunda, in the year 1583, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami finally disappeared from the vision of the world. His Samadhi Mandira was erected at the place on the banks of Radha-kunda where he would sit every day to chant the holy names of the Lord on his *japa* beads. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami was Rati Manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes. (Some say he was Rasa Manjari).

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.12 **Radharamana Mandira**

This is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda where one can see the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radharamana. On the *simhasan* of this temple can be seen the small deities of Radharamana, and to the right, the large deities of Revati-Balarama. The original temple of Radharamana in Vrindavana was established by Shrila Gopala Bhatta Goswami.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.13 Radha Govinda Mandira

This is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda where one can see the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Govinda. The original deity of Lord Govindaji was established in Vrindavana by Shrila Rupa Goswami.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.14 Jihva Mandira

This temple contains the famous Govardhana-*shila* that is non-different from the tongue of Giriraja Maharaja. The word '*jihva*' means 'tongue' and the worship of this particular *shila* was established by Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. Sometime after the first excavation of Radha-kunda undertaken by Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, the local population gradually expanded as more and more devotees came to live at Radha-kunda. As Raghunatha did not want people washing clothes or cleaning cooking utensils in the sacred *kunda*, he decided to excavate an ancient well formerly used by the *gopis* known as Gopi Kupa, so that local residents could obtain water for washing clothes and pots without polluting Radha-

kunda. During the course of digging inside the well, the workmen suddenly struck a rock which began to bleed. The workers were horrified, and fearing that it was some kind of bad omen or a serious offence, they ran to inform Raghunatha Dasa. Upon hearing the news Raghunatha immediately halted the excavation work for the day to consider the situation. That night in a dream, Giriraja Maharaja, the personified Govardhana Hill, appeared before Raghunatha and informed him that the rock that was inadvertently struck and began to bleed, was in fact Giriraja's own tongue. In the dream, Giriraja told Raghunatha to remove the rock and after placing it in a suitable temple, Raghunatha should worship it every day by offering Radha-kunda water and *tulasi* leaves. It is said that one who circumambulate this *jihva-shila* seven times receives the same benefit as performing a full *parikrama* of the Govardhana Hill.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.15 **Krishnadasa Kaviraja Bhajana Kutira**

This is the place near the banks of Shyama-kunda where Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami performed his *bhajana* and where he wrote his famous book about the life and times of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, known as the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*. Krishnadasa Kaviraja was the disciple of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami and moved to Radha-kunda in order to be close to his spiritual master and established his *bhajana kutira* next to that of Raghunatha Dasa. Every afternoon Raghunatha Dasa Goswami spoke about the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that he had personally witnessed while living under the care of Swarupa Damodara at Jagannatha Puri. From the discourses of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, and records from the personal diaries kept by both Swarupa Damodara and Murari Gupta, Krishnadasa Kaviraja was able to present an authentic account about the earthly pastimes of the 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This great classic amongst Vaishnava literatures was completed in the year 1581, just one year later, Krishnadasa Kaviraja entered *samadhi* and his body was subsequently cremated and his ashes were entombed at the Teen Goswami Samadhi Pitha. Other books written by Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami include the highly acclaimed *Govinda-lilamrta* and *Saranga-rangada*. The *Gaura-gonaddesa-dipika* mentions that Krishnadasa Kaviraja was Kasturi Manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.16 **Raghnatha Dasa Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

This is the place situated between the banks of Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda where the *bhajana kutira* of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami was situated. It was here where Raghunatha Dasa Goswami lived during his stay at Radha-kunda and where he held daily discourses on the transcendental pastimes of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that he had personally witnessed while in the Lord's direct association at Jagannatha Puri.

Raghunatha Dasa Goswami arrived in Vrindavana in 1535, shortly after the disappearance of Lord Chaitanya and moved to Radha-kunda on the advice of Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis. When Raghunatha had first arrived at Radha-kunda, the two sacred *kundas* were just small muddy pools of water about twelve feet in diameter situated in the middle of two adjacent paddy fields. Raghunatha Dasa could understand that in the near future, many Vaishnavas would come on pilgrimage to Radha-kunda and take bath in these sacred *kundas,* just as Lord Chaitanya had done when He discovered the *kundas* during His famous *parikrama* of Vraja in 1515. Shrila Jiva Goswami managed to purchase the two paddy fields where Radha-kunda and Syama-kunda were located in 1545, and Raghunatha Dasa immediately started the excavation work on the *kundas*. When all the mud had been removed from Radha-kunda, the ancient Kanchana-kunda, first built by Vajranabha Maharaja became visible. Raghunatha enlarged the area of the *kunda* and constructed stone *ghatas* on all four sides. When the mud was removed from Shyama-kunda, the ancient Vajra-kunda built by Vajranabha Maharaja also became visible; Raghunatha also enlarged the area of Shyama-kunda and constructed stone *ghatas* around its sides.

At first Raghunata Dasa lived under the trees situated around the sacred *kundas* but later a simple *bhajana kutira* was built by some of the locals for his protection. There are

many famous stories about how Raghunatha Dasa was so absorbed in *bhajana* that he would be totally unaware of his surroundings. One day Sanatana Goswami arrived at Radha-kunda to meet him and from a distance saw Raghunatha sitting next to the *kunda* totally immersed in the holy names of the Lord, and completely oblivious that two large tigers were drinking water from the *kunda* right next to him. Sanatana also saw someone standing there in order to protect Raghunatha in case the tigers turned violent. As he watched in amazement, Sanatana realized it was Lord Krishna Himself who was standing there to make sure that Raghunatha came to no harm. Lord Krishna turned His and smiled at Sanatana Goswami and then disappeared. Sanatana immediately told Raghunatha what he had just witnessed and asked him if it was the necessary that Lord Krishna had to come in person to protect him while he performed his *bhajana*, and implored him to accept a *bhajana kutira* for his own safety.

On another occasion Sanatana Goswami once again arrived at midday to meet Raghunatha Dasa and saw him sitting in the blazing sun, immersed in a trance-like state while shedding tears in ecstatic love. Sanatana also saw standing behind Raghunatha, a beautiful young girl who was holding her vale over Raghunatha's head in order to shade him from the sun's powerful rays. Due to the intense heat of the midday sun, the girl was perspiring so much that her clothing was completely soaked and puddles were forming around her feet which had caused the ground to become somewhat muddy. At that moment the girl turned to Sanatana and smiled very sweetly and suddenly disappeared. Sanatana immediately realized it was non-other than Radharani Herself, who had been protecting Raghunatha from the blazing sun. Sanatana rushed to tell Raghunatha what he had just witnessed, but Raghunatha could not believe that Radharani had personally come there to shade him from the sun. To prove his words, Sanatana pointed to the two small foot-prints in the wet mud directly behind the place where Raghunatha sat. Upon seeing Radha's foot-prints in the mud, Raghunatha broke down and began rolling back and forth on the ground while sobbing piteously at the thought of causing so such trouble to Radharani. After these incidents, Raghunatha Dasa readily agreed to accept a *bhajana kutira*.

There is another wonderful story about how deeply absorbed Raghunatha Dasa was in pure Krishna consciousness. Every afternoon, the devotees would gather at Raghunatha's *bhajana kutira* to hear from him about the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya that he had personally witnessed when he lived at Jagannatha Puri. On one particular afternoon, all the devotees waited patiently outside the *kutira*, but Raghunatha did not come out and everyone became worried. Sensing something was amiss; one of the devotees came to the doorway and enquired whether everything was alright. From inside the *kutira*, Raghunatha replied in a rather weakened voice, saying that unfortunately his material body was feeling somewhat indisposed. One of Raghunatha's followers named Vitthalanatha, the son of Vallabha Bhatta, immediately ran to fetch the local doctor. Within a short time two very experienced doctors arrived and entering the *kutira*, began to examine Raghunatha. The devotees were expecting the doctors to say that Raghunatha was not eating enough, as everyone knew that he only took one leaf-cup of buttermilk daily. After a thorough examination, both the doctors concluded that Raghunatha was suffering due to overeating sweet-rice pudding, and as such he was experiencing heaviness in the stomach. The devotees could not believe what they were hearing from the doctors, as everyone knew very well that Raghunatha had not eaten solid food in years. Understanding the utter confusion in the minds of the devotees, Raghunatha explained to everyone what had happened. Apparently, he had entered into in a deep trance while meditating on offering sweet-rice pudding to Radha and Krishna. The nectarine aroma of the sweet-rice was extremely pleasing and in his ecstasy of honoring the *prashadam* remnants, he had eaten far too much of the pudding, and this was the reason for his being indisposed. The devotees were completely astonished to hear Raghunatha's incredible explanation and all the devotees felt thoroughly blessed to be in the association of such an exalted *nitya-siddha* Vaishnava like Raghunatha Dasa.

Besides performing *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill, Raghunatha Dasa would also circumambulate Radha-kunda as part of his daily observances. Whoever he met he would offer his humble obeisance's to them regardless of who they were. Therefore, besides

chanting a hundred thousand names of God, he would also offer hundreds and sometimes thousands of obeisance's to Vaisnavas, *Vrajavasis*, and visiting pilgrims, every day while traversing the *parikrama* path. During his life at Radha-kunda, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami also wrote three greatly celebrated books; *Vraja-vilasa-stava, Dana-keli-chintamani*, and *Mukta-charita*, which are greatly cherished by all Gaudiya Vaishnavas.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.17 Vishvanatha Chakravarti Bhajana Kutira

Shrila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura was an important *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* in the latter part of the 17TH Century, and rose to prominence some sixty years after the disappearance of Shrila Jiva Goswami. Vishvanatha Chakravarti was born into a *brahmana* family in Bengal in the year 1638, and first arrived at Radha-kunda around 1655. He was still very young at the time and took shelter of Mukunda Dasa, a disciple of Krishnadasa Kaviraja and stayed with him in the old *bhajana kutira* of the Kaviraja. After some time he went back to Bengal for a short stay but soon returned making Radha-kunda the main base of his activities. At that time he established his own *bhajana kutira* next to the *bhajana kutira* of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. Vishvanatha is considered one of the greatest scholars of the Gaudiya *sampradaya* and while staying at Radha-kunda, he wrote many of his celebrated books which numbered over forty including; *Vraja-riti-chintamani, Shri Krishna Bhavanamrita, Sankalpa-kalpa-druma, Madhurya-kadambini, Mantrartha Dipika,* and *Chamatkara-chandrika.* His commentary on the *Srimad Bhagavatam* was very highly acclaimed and was one of the commentaries used as a reference by Shrila Prabhupada while writing his own now famous commentary on *Bhagavatam.* He also composed a number of important *bhajans* and *kirtans*, the most famous of which is the *Shri-Shri-gurvastaka* (Prayers to the Spiritual Master), which is sung in all Iskcon temples every morning during *mangala aratika*

Once during the writing of his book *Mantrartha Dipika*, which was an explanation of the *kama-gayatri* mantra, after extensively researching all the known scriptures on the subject, he concluded there were twenty-five full syllables contained in the mantra. But after reading *Chaitanya-charitamrita* he became extremely perplexed, because Krishnadasa Kaviraja had stated that there were only twenty four and a half syllables in the *kama gayatri* mantra. Vishvanatha began to think that Krishnadasa Kaviraja must have made a mistake, as all previous authorities and Vedic scholars had stated that there were twenty five syllables in the *gayatri* mantra, and this was also his own conclusion. After thinking that Krishnadasa Kaviraja must have made an error in *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, Vishvanatha immediately condemned himself for such an offensive mentality, in doubting the words of a pure devotee, nevertheless, he was unable to resolve the dilemma as all the known Vedic *shastras* stated there were twenty five full syllables in the *kama-gayatri*. Vishvanatha felt the only solution to rid himself of such doubts was simply to commit suicide, rather than remain a doubting offender at the feet of such a great devotee like Krishnadasa Kaviraja.

Having decided to fast unto death, Vishvanatha remained awake the whole night chanting the holy names while at the same time feeling immense sorrow at his wretched plight. As dawn approached, Vishvanatha closed his weary eyes and momentarily fell into a dream. Suddenly Radharani appeared before him smiling benevolently and spoke to Vishvanatha in a very sweet and soothing voice saying. 'Oh Vishvanatha, please do not lament anymore. What Krishnadasa has written is true, he is my confidential maidservant and thus he knows everything about My innermost moods. The *kama-gayatri* is the mantra for worshiping Me. Indeed, I am revealed by the syllables of this mantra. Without My mercy, no one can understand the mystery of this mantra. Look at the book known as *Varnagama-bhasvadi* to find the solution to the half syllable. Krishnadasa read this book and wrote as he did. Please listen carefully, the *vi*, as in the words *kama devaya vidmahe*, is considered to be only a half syllable, because this half syllable falls on Krishna's forehead, and because Krishna's forehead is shaped like the halo of a half-moon, then the *vi* can only be considered as a half syllable. All other letters in the mantra are considered as full syllables and are therefore all full-moons. Now wake-up, read the book *Varnagama-bhasvadi* and compile the

evidence for everyone's benefit.' Immediately waking up on Radharani's command, Vishvanatha found himself immersed in ecstatic feelings and his whole being felt illuminated, having witnessed in his dream the divine vision of Srimati Radharani. Vishvanatha immediately searched out the book *Varnagama-bhasavi* from the *kutira* of Krishnadasa Kaviraja and after having fully digested its contents, completed his book *Mantrartha Dipika*, explaining all the most confidential meanings of the *kama-gayatri* mantra.

After the departure of the great Gaudiya Vaishnava *acharya*, Shrila Jiva Goswami in the year 1608, a great vacuum arose and gradually many philosophical differences created confusion amongst the many followers of Jiva Goswami. This was because there were no empowered devotees of any stature present in Vrindavana during the interceding period in the early 17th Century, prior the emergence of Shrila Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura. The conflict arose from a division amongst Jiva's followers regarding whether Radha and Krishna were actually married or not. One group began worshiping the 'Divine Couple' as being married (*svakiya-vada*), while the others continued to worship the 'divine couple' as paramours (*parakiya-vada*). This controversy began to arise even during the time of Jiva's presence amongst a group of neophytes who considered themselves as great *panditas* or scholars. In order to accommodate these less-intelligent misguided neophytes, Jiva Gosvami, in his commentary on Rupa Goswami's *Ujjvala-nilamani*, had acknowledged the *svakiya-vada*. Unfortunately, none of the *panditas* could realize that in other literatures written by Jiva, the *parakiya-vada* has been stressed.

Before the appearance of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the worship of Radharani was non-existent and there were no deities of Radharani in any temple. Besides this, the *parakiya-rasa* enjoyed by Radha and Krishna as unmarried lovers or paramours, was not openly discussed due to the strict social and religious practices prevalent in Indian society at the time. There were many religious-minded moralists who firmly believed that the Vrindavana pastimes of Radha and Krishna's were simply the immoral activities of an ordinary boy and girl. The propagation of the *parakiya-vada* as being the pinnacle of Krishna's pastimes, and the promotion of Radharani as the Supreme Goddess and the source of even Lakshmi and Savitri, was completely revolutionary at the time. Lord Chaitanya gave the responsibility of revealing the philosophical evidence about the exalted nature of *parakiya-vada*, solely in the hands of the Six Goswamis. Therefore, in the early days of the Lord Chaitanya's movement, misunderstanding amongst neophytes was not uncommon. Even today, there are many neophytes and so-called religious moralists, who are unable to comprehend Krishna's *gopi-lila* pastimes and the *parakiya-vada*. The so-called scholars amongst Jiva Goswami's followers, due to their mundane and rigid moralistic viewpoint, and lack of true philosophical understanding, eventually became militant in their advocacy of *svakiya-vada* being the highest truth.

From the point of view of Lord Chaitanya's philosophy and teachings, Radha and Krishna are eternally paramours, because the highest expression of transcendental loving emotions like *gopi-bhava, vipralambha-bhava*, and *maha-bhava,* can only be experienced within the highly exalted *parakiya-rasa* which is manifest only in Vraja-Vrindavana. In Vaikuntha, the *parakiya-rasa* is unknown and Laksmi and Narayana are eternally married. This means that the so-called marriage of Radha and Krishna that takes place during Their earthly pastimes in Vrindavana, is simply to fulfill the transcendental desires of Their most confidential devotees.

As Vishvanatha slowly emerged as the spiritual heir to Jiva Goswami, due to his vast knowledge of Vaishnava scripture and the writings of the Six Goswamis, he was able to defeat one by one the arguments presented by so-called *panditas* and proponents of *svakiya-vada*. Being in utter disarray after having been so soundly defeated by Vishvanatha and unable to present any substantial arguments to support their *svakiya-vada* philosophy, the deviant so-called *panditas*, out of sheer frustration and unable to take their defeat lightly, hatched a plot to eliminate Vishvanatha Chakravarti. Knowing that Vishvanatha was performing solitary *bhajana* and the *seva-puja* of his deity at Radha-kunda, some of the deviant *panditas* affiliated to the *svakiya-vadi* group, secretly entered the nearby forest and

hid in the bushes waiting for Vishvanatha, with the intention of beating him to death. Nevertheless, after waiting in the forest for a considerable time, there was no sign of Vishvanatha anywhere. Suddenly the *panditas* noticed a beautiful young girl of not more than twelve years of age picking flowers in the forest; the *panditas* came out from hiding and asked the girl if by chance she had seen Vishvanatha. The girl replied that she had indeed seen him, but now he had gone elsewhere to pick flowers. While talking to the little girl, the *panditas* were so enchanted by her effulgent complexion and natural beauty, as well as her charm and grace, they completely forgot their enmity towards Vishvanatha and felt fully contented simply talking to the sweet and innocent little girl. The *panditas* then asked the girl who she was and for whom she was picking flowers. The girl very innocently replied that she was a maidservant of Shrimati Radharani and had been sent to pick flowers so that Radha could make a garland for her beloved paramour Shri Krishna. The *panditas* were totally shocked by the reply and simply looked at each other in utter astonishment, being completely bewildered by what they had just heard. When they were about to ask the girl for a further explanation, as they turned around to speak to her, she had disappeared, and they saw only Vishvanatha in the distance, picking flowers for his *seva-puja*.

The *panditas* could immediately understand that the vision they had just seen was extraordinary, and that the form of the girl they saw, was in fact Vishvanatha's eternal spiritual form (*siddha-deha*), as a *manjari* maidservant of Radharani. They realized the mercy being bestowed upon them by the Lord and they immediately prostrated themselves before Vishvanatha, while begging forgiveness for their sinful and offensive mentality. Vishvanatha immediately forgave them and then asked the *panditas* a simple question; which village lies between Radha's home in Varsana and Krishna's home at Nandagrama. The *panditas* replied that it was the village of Sanket. Vishvanatha then said that if Radha and Krishna were actually married, why did They always meet secretly at Sanket at the dead of night, and not at one of their homes, which would be the natural place for a married couple to meet. The *panditas* could not reply, because even from an ordinary social perspective, they could understand that Radha and Krishna never met publicly at Varsana or Nandagrama, or at any other place. The *panditas,* who were all Vaishnava followers of the Six Goswamis and specifically owed allegiance to Jiva Goswami, were thus saved by the mercy of Vishvanatha, and consequently they accepted him as their *siksha* guru.

Vishvanatha Chakravarti, while living Radha-kunda, began worshiping the small deity of Gokulanandaji and also took over the worship of the Govardhana-*shila* of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami given to Raghunatha as a gift by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, both these deities were later installed in the Radha Gokulananda Mandira in Vrindavana. Vishvanatha Chakravarti had one very brilliant disciple named Baladeva Vidyabhushana who became the next *acharya* in the disciplic succession of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*. Vishnanatha Chakravarti Thakura disappeared from the world in 1708, and his *samadhi* is located in the garden of the Radha Gokulananda Mandira in Vrindavana. It is said that in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes, Vishvanatha was Vinoda Vallari-manjari.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.18 Teen Gosvami Samadhi Pitha

This is the *samadhi pitha* of three important Gaudiya Goswamis namely; Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, and Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, who were all cremated at Radha-kunda and their ashes were entombed at this place. This area was previously an open space near the banks of Radha-kunda, is said to be the actual site of the cremation ceremony. Due to the volatile political situation prevailing in India at that time, and the constant threat posed by Muslim fanatics, it was decided to cremate the bodies of these famous Vaishnava saints, so that in the future their sacred remains could not be dug-up and desecrated. These highly venerated Goswamis all lived at Radha-kunda and were also close friends. They all disappeared on the same day, *Ashvina-sukla-dwadashi* in the Vaishnava month of *Damodara*, but in different years; 1579, 1582, and 1583, respectively. A portion of their ashes were also entombed at other locations; Raghunatha Bhatta's ashes were entombed at the Sixty-four Samadhi Pitha in Vrindavana, the ashes of Krishnadasa

Kaviraja at the Radha Damodara Mandira in Vrindavana, and the ashes of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami at the place on the banks of Radha-kunda, where he sat every day to chant his *japa*.
How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.19 Gopala Bhatta Goswami Bhajana Kutira

This is the place on the banks of Radha-kunda where Gopala Bhatta Goswami performed his *bhajana.* He established the Radharamana Mandira in Vrindavana and in the later years of his life spent much of his time living at Radha-kunda in the association of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, Krishnadasa Kaviraja, and Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami. It is said that due to his great humility he requested Krishnadasa Kaviraja not to mention his name in the *Chaitanya-charitamrita*. Lokanatha Goswami also made a similar requested to Krishnadasa Kaviraja. The *samadhi* of Gopala Bhatta Goswami is situated at the Radharamana Mandira in Vrindavana. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Gopala Bhatta Goswami was Guna Manjari in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.
How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.20 Manasa-pavana Ghata

This is the celebrated *ghata* where Radharani and Her girlfriend came every day at noontime to bathe in the transcendental waters of the lake. After bathing here at Manasa-pavana-ghata, Radharani would then meet Krishna on the banks of Radha-kunda and enjoy various loving pastimes until it was time to return home to Yavata in the late afternoon. It is said that of all the bathing places in the whole of Vraja, this is Radha's favorite. According to Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, in the *aprakata-lila* or unmanifested pastimes, Radharani bathes here at Manasa-pavana-ghata every day at noon. Just after the transcendental appearance of Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda, Krishna immediately bathed in Radha's newly made *kunda* and named it as Radha-kunda. Radharani then came to this *ghata* and bathed in Krishna's newly made *kunda* while giving it the name Shyama-kunda. At that time, Radharani said that anyone who took bath in Shyama-kunda with firm faith and devotion would achieve the same level of divine love for Krishna, that would be equal to Her own love.

At the top of the *ghata* steps is a *pilu* bush where Radharani and the *gopis* would hang their clothing while they bathed in Shyama-kunda. It is said that the *jiva who* was born as this *pilu* bush was formerly a pious *brahmana* who had lived at Kashi. His only desire was to render humble service to Radharani, and by the mercy of Krishna, he was able to take birth as this *pilu* bush at Manasa-pavana Ghata. During the time that Vashvanatha Chakravarti lived here, this *jiva* began conversing with Vishvanath and revealed to him all these facts of his previous life, and they also discussed the divine pastimes of Radha and Krishna with each other. It is mentioned that in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes, when Krishna planted pearls in His pearl garden, it was *pilu* bushes that grew there and bore all the valuable pearls.
How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.21 Pancha Pandava Ghata

This *ghata* was named after the five Pandava who were the sons of Maharaja Pandu and the heroes of the Mahabharata war. It is said that these five brothers took birth here in the form of trees on the bank of Shyama-kunda in order to meditate on the transcendental pastimes of Lord Krishna. During the excavation of Shyama-kunda, these five trees were going to be cut down along with others so that Shyama-kunda could be made into a square-shape, the same as Radha-kunda. The night before the trees were to be cut down, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami had a dream in which Yudhisthira Maharaja appeared before him and told him that the five trees on the bank of Shyama-kunda were in fact the five Pandavas, and requested Raghunatha not to cut them down. Consequently, after receiving the dream, Raghunatha Dasa cancelled the cutting of the trees and therefore Shyama-kunda was made in a tri-angular shape. Directly in front of Vishvanatha Chakravarti's *bhajana kutira* is a dead tree trunk that is said to have been the tree in which Bhima took birth. The last of the five

trees which is still living, is an *ashoka* tree said to be Arjuna, which is situated about thirty meters along the *ghata* to the east. The locals say that this tree has existed as long as anyone can remember and it flowers once every year.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.22 Bhaktivinoda Thakura Bhajana Kutira

This is the *bhajana kutira* established by the celebrated 19TH Century Gaudiya Vaishnava *acharya* Shrila Sachinanandana Bhaktivinoda Thakura who was born in Bengal in 1838. The *bhajana kutira* was named Vraja-swananda-sukhada Kunja, which means 'The forest grove that gives one happiness and bliss', and was built in 1900, around the time Shrila Bhaktivinoda was retiring from his post as a Magistrate. He was a prolific author of Vaishnava literature and wrote a number of important books and a host of well known *bhajans* and *kirtans*. Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was also responsible for discovering the location of Lord Chaitanya's Mahaprabhu's birthplace at Shridhama Mayapura and also oversaw the construction of a temple at the sight which is known as the Yoga-pitha.

Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura single-handedly carried forward the mission of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at a time when the scripturally deviant *sahaja-sampradayas* were gaining prominence and were bringing a bad name to Bhagavata religion and specifically the worship of Radha and Krishna including the mission of Lord Chaitanya, due to their sinful and immoral escapades. During this time, Bhaktivinoda Thakura fervently prayed to Krishna to send someone to help him in spreading the *sankirtana* movement. Within a short time he was blessed with a brilliant son named Bhimal Prashada, who took birth at Puri in 1874, and who later, after receiving initiation from Gaura-Kishore Dasa Babaji Maharaja, became famous as Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami, the 'Lion Guru', who fearlessly challenged the devious *sahajiyas* and especially the *jati-gosai* or caste-*goswamis*. Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati was such a powerful preacher that his opponents would run away as soon as they saw him, due to their fear of being utterly defeated and humiliated in a philosophical debate.

Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura lived at Jagannatha Puri in Orissa for a considerable period where he was the local Magistrate. He also oversaw the management of the Jagannatha Temple and was responsible for raising the standards of worship by regulating the various temple *pujas* and *bhoga* offerings to Lord Jagannatha. Previously the famous South Indian *acharya* Ramanuja had also attempted to regulate the deity worship, but it became far too ritualistic for the Orissan *brahmanas* to accept and he was unable to continue. Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was an empowered *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and therefore he was more successful in raising the standards of the temple. In the 'Iron Age' of Kali-*yuga*, Jagannatha Puri is the Yuga-*tirtha*, Lord Jagannatha is the Yuga-*murti*, and Lord Chaitanya is the Yuga-*avatara*, also referred to in the Vedas as the 'Golden Avatara'. Consequently the *Yuga-dharma*, or form of religious practice recomended for this particular age, is the *sankirtana-yajna* that was introduced by the Yuga-*avatara* Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

This *bhajana kutira* was later utilised by Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati after the disappearance of his famous father and is presently being managed by the Gaudiya Matha. It was here at Radha-kunda in 1935, where His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada met Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati who, due to a crisis over one of his temples proprietorship, told him that if he ever got sufficient funds, he should print books rather than build temples. Within the compound of the *bhajana kutira* one can see the *pushpa samadhi* of Shrila Bhaktivinoda Thakura who disappeared in 1914, as well as the *pushpa samadhi* of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati who disappeared in 1936, and also a number of items used by Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati during the period when he stayed here and which are now on display.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.23 **Jiva Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

This is where Shrila Jiva Goswami performed his *bhajana* whenever he came to visit Radha-kunda. Jiva Goswami was given the responsibility for the well-being of Raghunatha Dasa on behalf of his uncles Rupa and Sanatana. Although it was Raghunatha Dasa who was the inspiration and who first proposed the idea of excavating the two sacred *kundas,* it was Jiva Goswami who managed all the affairs for developing Radha-kunda, because Raghunatha Dasa was so deeply absorbed in *bhajana*, it was felt he could not be burdened with all the day-to-day details, although he was instrumental in the basic planning and development.

When Raghunatha Dasa Goswami first thought about removing the thick mud and building stone bathing *ghatas* around the two *kundas*, he began thinking from where all the money needed for such a project would come from. As he began to ponder the funding of the excavation work, he suddenly checked himself, feeling disgusted that he was now thinking about getting money, and immediately gave up the idea. At that moment, far away in the Himalayan Mountains, a very wealthy merchant named Samarpana had gone to Badrinatha Dhama for *darshana* and was also planning to donate a large sum of money to the temple of Lord Badri-Narayana. During the night, the merchant had a dream in which Lord Badri-Narayana appeared before him and told him to go instead to Radha-kunda, and donate the money to a very exalted saint named Raghunatha Dasa, and concluded by saying this would be make the Lord very happy. The next day the merchant started on his journey to Vrindavana and after finding Raghunatha Dasa, donated a very large sum of money to him. After receiving the donation, Raghunatha Dasa called Jiva Goswami to Radha-kunda to take charge of managing the excavation work. Jiva Goswami also purchased the two paddy fields where the sacred *kundas* were situated and also made arrangements for the laborers and building materials for constructing the *ghatas*. Jiva Goswami purchased the land at Radha-kunda in 1542, and in deeds to the land which still exist, it mentions that Raghunatha Dasa Goswami was appointed as the first *Mahant* of the two sacred lakes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.24 **Lalita-kunda**

Lalita-kunda is situated next to the temple of Lalita-bihari, where one can see the deities of Krishna and Lalita standing together on the *simhasana*. Lalita-kunda is the personal *kunda* of Radharani's closest friend Lalita-*sakhi*. The natural spring beneath Radha-kunda first flows into Shyama-kunda and the water from Shyama-kunda then flows into Lalita-kunda through a narrow waterway. (The natural spring appeared in Radha-kunda after all the holy *tirthas* entered the *kunda* from Shyama-kunda). Each of the eight girlfriends of Radharani known as the *ashta-sakhis* also have their own *kundas* situated around Shyama-kunda, and previously the water from Lalita-kunda would also flow into the *kundas* of the other *sakhis*. Unfortunately today, accept for Lalita-kunda, the *kundas* of the other *sakhis* are only visible during the monsoon season.

Lalita-sakhi is the most important amongst Radharani's girlfriends and is also Her most confidential adviser, especially in matters of love. Similarly, Rupa Manjari is the most confidential maidservant to Lalita-sakhi. Therefore it is said that before one can approach Radharani, one must first seek the permission and blessings of Lalita, similarly before one can approach Lalita, one must first get the permission and blessings of Rupa-manjari. Consequently, when Lalita-sakhi took part in Lord Chaitanya's pastimes, she appeared as Swarupa Damodara Goswami, Lord Chaitanya's personal secretary, and no one could approach Lord Chaitanya without first getting the permission and blessings of Swarupa Damodara. Similarly, when Rupa-manjari appeared in Lord Chaitanya's pastimes, she appeared as Shrila Rupa Goswami, and it is said that those who wish to serve Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, must take shelter of Shrila Rupa Goswami, who is the foremost authority and undisputed leader amongst Lord Chaitanya's followers. Therefore, unless one accepts the teachings of pure devotional service as revealed by Shrila Rupa Goswami, that unfortunate person can never achieve a direct relationship with Lord Chaitanya. It has also stated in the Vaishnava scriptures that unless one takes shelter of Lord Chaitanya, it is not possible to be recognized by Radha and Krishna. This is because when Radha and Krishna appear on earth

in the Kali-*yuga*, They do so in the combined form of Lord Chaitanya, therefore if one is not a follower of Lord Chaitanya, how can they possibly claim to be follower of Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.25 **Radha Vinoda Mandira**

This small roadside temple contains the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Vinoda. The original deity of Vinodaji was discovered by Lokanatha Goswami in Kishore-kunda near Umraya. The deity was later installed at the Radha Gokulananda Mandira in Vrindavana, and is presently being worshiped in Jaipura. This temple is not one of Radha-kunda's famed Goswami temples.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.26 **Madhavendra Puri Baithaka**

This is the celebrated sitting place of Shrila Madhavendra Puri Goswami whose *bhajana kutira* is at Govinda-kunda. The word '*baithaka'* means 'sitting place' and this where Shrila Madhavendra Puri used to sit and rest when he was performing *parikrama* around Govardhana Hill. At the time when Madhavendra Puri sat here, Radha-kunda had not been discovered, and this location was the eastern-most point on the Govardhana *parikrama* path, with Apsara-kunda at Punchari being the western-most point.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.27 **Gopi Kupa**

It is said that this ancient well was used by the *gopis* and once when Krishna was feeling thirsty, the *gopis* gave water to Him from this well so that Krishna could quench His thirst. This is also the celebrated well where Raghunatha Dasa Goswami discovered the famous *jihva-shila* or 'Tongue of Govardhana', which was discovered by chance when workers under Raghunatha's supervision, were excavating this old and dilapidated well, in order to provide water for the local inhabitants of Radha-kunda.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.28 Radha Madhava Mandira

In this temple one can see the *prathibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Madhava. The original deities were formerly worshiped by Shrila Jayadeva Goswami. There is also the *pushpa samadhi* of Jaideva Goswami in the temple courtyard. Many years after Jayadeva's disappearance, his deities were sent to Vrindavana to be worshiped until the time of Aurangzeb's attack on the holy city in 1670, when these deities along with all the other Gaudiya Goswami deities were moved to Jaipura in Rajasthana. Jaideva Goswami was a great devotee of Radha and Krishna and was born during the 12th Century and is believed to have lived at Jagannatha Puri for a large part of his life. He is one of the most well known poets in Indian history and was the author of the highly acclaimed *Gita Govinda*, a poem which contemplates the feelings of separation experienced by both Radha and Krishna. The *Gita Govinda* was a great favorite of Lord Chaitanya, and the devotees at Puri would daily recite its verses for the pleasure of Mahaprabhu. Jaideva also composed the famous *Dasavatara-stotram* glorifying the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The deities of Jayadeva Goswami are now worshiped in Jaipura at the palatial Kanaka Bhavana.

R.29 **Chaitanya Baithaka / Tamala Tala Ghata**

This is the famous sitting place or *baithaka* of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, from where He first realized the actual location of Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda. During Lord Chaitanya's *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala in 1515, when he arrived near Govardhana hill, He began enquiring about the location of Radha-kunda from the local *Vrajavasis*, but no one knew its whereabouts. It appeared that all knowledge about the sacred lakes was lost, like many other holy places in Vraja connected to Krishna's pastimes five thousand years earlier. The locals mentioned that the only water source in the nearby vicinity was the natural

underground spring which fed two paddy fields named by the locals as Kali and Gauri, where rice was at that time being grown. The words '*kali*' means 'black' and '*gauri*' means 'white', which seems to have been a reference to Radha and Krishna. Feeling somewhat disappointed at not finding Radha-kunda, Lord Chaitanya came to this spot and sat beneath a *tamal* tree which overlooked the two paddy fields. This place became celebrated as Tamala Tala Ghata, due to the *tamala* tree under which Lord Chaitanya sat.

While deeply absorbed in contemplation and chanting the holy names on His beads, Lord Chaitainya understood through His divine vision, that the small reservoir of water in the paddy fields was in fact Radha-kunda. The Lord immediately went there in great ecstasy, and in the small amount of water that was available; the Lord joyously took his bath, much to the surprise of the local people. While chanting the holy names, the Lord anointed His transcendental body with Vaishnava *tilaka* using the grey colored mud of Radha-kunda. Lord Chaitanya also collected a portion of the sacred mud to take with Him on His journey. After bathing at Radha-kunda, Lord Chaitanya continued His *parikrama* of Vraja and proceeded towards Kusuma-sarovara and Manasi-ganga.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.30 **Madana-mohana Mandira / Sanatana Goswami Baithaka**

This is one of the 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda which was established at the spot where Sanatana Goswami used to sit on the banks of Shyama-kunda and perform his *bhajana*. In this temple one can see the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Madana-mohana and the *baithaka* or sitting place of Sanatana Goswami. Sanatana travelled extensively throughout Vraja and often visited Radha-kunda where his favorite spot for chanting *japa* was near the Sangama on the banks of Shyama-kunda, where he had a panoramic vista of both the sacred *kundas*.

On one occasion when Sanatana Goswami was visiting Radha-kunda along with Rupa Goswami, there was an amazing incident concerning a discussion about a verse written by Rupa Goswami in one of his books. On that day, Sanatana Goswami, Rupa Goswami, and Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, had been discussing various transcendental topics, when Sanatana expressed a grave doubt about the use of a particular metaphor in a verse written by Rupa in his book *Catu Pushpanjali*, in which he glorified Radha's luxuriant long black hair and compared it to the hood of a black cobra**.** Sanatana felt that comparing Radha's long black braid as resembling the hood of a serpent may not be so tasteful. The verse written by Rupa Goswami was, **"O Radharani, O Queen, as golden as fresh gorochana, O Queen, whose beautiful clothes are as splendid as a blue lotus, O Queen, whose braid decorated with jewels and flowers, is glistening like the hood of a serpent".** After the discussions, everyone returned to their duties and Sanatana went to the bank of Radha-kunda near Govinda Ghata to take bath. As he was about to bathe, he noticed some young girls playing on a swing hanging from a nearby tree. At that moment, he suddenly saw a poisonous black cobra crawling up the back of the young girl sitting on the swing. Sanatana immediately called out to the girl to warn her. The girl immediately turned around and Sanatana realized it was not a cobra, but the girl's long black hair braid that he had mistaken for a black cobra. The girl then smiled very sweetly at Sanatana and then quickly disappeared along with her friends. Sanatana was momentarily stunned by what he had just seen and was experiencing the flow of ecstatic symptoms throughout his body and mind. He then realized that this was actually a vision of Radharani that he had seen; who had appeared there in order to help him understand the truth regarding Rupa's super-excellent verse, which was a perfect description of Radha's exquisitely beautiful hair. Sanatana immediately went to find Rupa in to inform him of his vision and to congratulate him on his perfect use of the metaphor, describing Radha's braid as the glistening hood of a serpent.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.31 **Sangama / Charana-Chinha**

This place is known as the *sangam* or meeting place, where the two sacred *kundas*, Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda, meet each other through a small channel beneath the *sangama* causeway. It is said that at this sacred place, in Their transcendental liquid forms, Radha and Krishna eternally embrace each other without fear of ever being separated. The *Vraja-riti-chintamani* says, **"Longing to meet, but forced to remain apart, Radha and Krishna assumed the forms of these two lakes and in this way are eternally splashed with the nectar of Their meeting."** This form of Radha and Krishna eternally embracing one-another is called Jugala-Kishore and the *ghatas* on either side of the Sangama are also called the Jugala-sangama Ghata. The word '*jugala*' means 'combined together'. The meeting place of the two *kundas* is also known as the 'Ratna-Vedi', which means the 'jeweled altar' on which the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna are locked in eternal embrace. The Sangama is the actual centre of the sacred *kundas* and is also referred to as the 'Yoga-Pitha'. The word '*yoga-pitha'* means the secret meeting place and in the *aprakata-lila* or unmanifested pastimes, Radha and Krishna meet at this place with all their eternal associates. Also in the *aprakata-lila,* the Ratna-Vedi is seen as being a gem encrusted causeway across the Sangama.

This is also the place where, after Radharani had finished digging Her own *kunda*, the holy waters in Shyama-kunda broke through its banks and filled Radha-kunda with the water of the holy *tirthas*. At this place one can also see the marble impressions of Radha and Krishna's lotus feet known as the Charana-Chinha. The word '*charana* means 'lotus feet' and '*chinha*' means 'indented' or 'engraved'. There is also a shrine at the Sangama containing a large collection of Govardhana-*shilas*. The Sangama is the most popular place for pilgrims to take their holy bath in the sacred *kundas*. According to tradition, one should first bathe in Radha-kunda, then bathe in Shyama-kunda, and then bathe again in Radha-kunda. This is also the traditional way of bathing on the occasion of Bahulashtami, the appearance day of Radha-kunda.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.32 **Imli Tala**

This is the place where a very large tamarind tree once stood and it was the place where Rupa Goswami witnessed the most incredible swing pastimes of Radha and Krishna known as *jhulana-lila*. The word '*imli*' means 'tamarind' and '*tala*' means 'tree'. Once while Rupa Goswami was spending some time at Radha-kunda, he came and sat beneath this huge tamarind tree and became deeply absorbed in chanting *japa*. The next thing he became aware of was a very nicely decorated swing that he noticed hanging from one of the tree's branches. The swing, also called a *jhula*, was designed in such a way that two persons could sit on the swing while facing each other. Then all of a sudden, Rupa Goswami saw both Radha and Krishna arrive at the swing accompanied by all their *gopi* girlfriends. Krishna immediately climbed onto the swing and then invited Radharani to join Him. Radharani at first refused, because Krishna sometimes made this particular swing go far too high, which would always frighten Her. Krishna then promised that He would not to cause the swing go so high and the *gopis* said that they would themselves push the swing and would not allow it to go so very high. After much persuading, Radharani ultimately agreed to everyone's repeated requests and sat down on the swing facing Krishna.

The *gopis* then began to gently push the swing backwards and forwards much to the pleasure of everyone. When Krishna saw that Radharani and the *gopis* were in a happy and relaxed mood while enjoying the *jhulana* pastimes, He cunningly began to move His legs 'to and fro' in order to make the swing go gradually higher. Within a very short time, and before the *gopis* could realize what was happening, the swing was going so high there was no way that they could control it. As the swing went even higher, Radharani pleaded with Krishna to stop, but Krishna just smiled sweetly and made the swing go even higher. Suddenly the swing reached such a height that it appeared that it would go a full circle right over the top of the tree branch. At that moment Radharani screamed aloud and leaped forward, throwing Her arms around Krishna's neck while holding on for dear life. At that moment the swing went a full circle right over the top of the tree branch and came down on the other side. The

gopis were amazed to see the swing go right over the top of the branch with Radharani firmly holding on to Krishna's neck as if Her very life depended on it. When the swing finally slowed down, Radharani was still holding Krishna tightly in Her arms as if She would never let go. The *gopis* were so overjoyed and ecstatic to see Radharani embracing Krishna with such force, and they all started to laugh and clap their hands, while praising the incredible and uncommon pastimes of the 'divine lovers'. At that same moment, having observed all that had happened, as waves of ecstasy flowed through the body and mind of Rupa Goswami, he suddenly lost consciousness and fell on the ground. When Rupa finally regained his senses, he saw that Radha and Krishna had left with Their friends, but the swing was still there hanging from the tree branch. Then, to his utter amazement, he noticed that the branch holding the swing was completely twisted due to the force of the swing as it went a full circle right over the top and down the other side.

This twisted tamarind tree became very famous and every pilgrim who visited Radha-kunda went to have *darshana* of the Imli Tala. Unfortunately, during the mid-seventies, this tamarind tree eventually died leaving only a stump. Nevertheless, pilgrims still go there just to pay their obeisances and remember the incredible swing pastime witnessed here by Shrila Rupa Goswami.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.33 **Nityananda Baithaka**

This is the sitting place of Lord Nityananda, who toured Vraja Mandala some years before Lord Chaitanya arrived in the holy Dhama. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, Lord Nityananda was completely overcome by the transcendental mood and sentiments of a cowherd boy, and quite often exhibited the mood and behavior of Lord Balarama. Lord Nityananda behaved exactly like an *avadhuta* or holy madman as He wandered around Vraja in transcendental ecstasy. An *avadhuta* is a *sadhu* who has lost all mundane consciousness of living in the material world and is completely absorbed in God consciousness.

After visiting all the holy places of Vraja, Lord Nityananda eventually arrived at Govardhana and began wandering around the sacred Hill in search of Krishna, repeatedly calling out, "Kanhaiya, Kanhaiya, where are You" while completely immersed in Balarama's feelings of separation from His younger brother, whom he affectionately called Kanhaiya. Lord Nityananda was asking every *Vrajavasi* that he met if they had seen Kanhaiya. The *Vrajavasis* were bewildered by Nityananda's behavior and were unable to answer. Lord Nityananda eventually found His way to this place and after sitting down, began crying uncontrollably at His failure to find his beloved Kanhaiya. Suddenly there was a celestial voice from the sky which said that Kanhaiya had now appeared in Navadwipa. Hearing this voice, Lord Nityananda became filled with transcendental happiness and immediately got up and started the journey to Bengal. (The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Nityananda had gone to Shringara Vata in Vrindavana and was sitting there when He heard the celestial Voice).

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.34 **Radha Gopinatha Mandira**

This is one of the famed 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda and one can see the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Gopinatha. The original temple of Radha Gopinatha was established by Madhu Pandita Goswami in Vrindavana after he and his dear friend Paramananda Bhattacharya discovered the deity of Gopinathaji buried in the ground at Vansi Vata. In all the Gopinatha temples, Ananga-manjari, Radha's younger sister is standing in Radha's place on the left of Krishna, and Radha is standing on the right.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

R.35 **Radha Gokulananda Mandira**

This is one of the famed 'Seven Goswami Temples' of Radha-kunda where one can see the *pratibhu* deities of Shri Shri Radha Gokulananda. The original temple of Radha Gokulananda in Vrindavana was established by Lokanatha Goswami. Although this is the

first temple on the road when entering Radha-kunda, it is the last to be visited when performing *parikrama* of the sacred *kundas*. This is because the traditional starting place of Radha-kunda *parikrama* is from the bank of the sacred *kunda* itself, and after paying obeicenses to the sacred *kundas;* one then takes the blessings of Kundeshwara Mahadava in order to perform a successful *parikrama.* This is also the place where Lokanatha Goswami performed his *bhajana* inside a small a cave (*gufa*) when he stayed at Radha-kunda. He travelled extensively all over Vraja living under trees or sometimes in caves. The small cave at Radha-kunda where Lokanatha Goswami stayed can still be seen as well as his *pushpa Samadhi*. Lokanatha's original *samadhi* is located at the Radha Gokulananda Mandira in Vrindavana.

How To Get There: (see map no. 14)

The Tradition of Bathing at the End of Radha-kunda Parikrama

Once the *parikrama* of Radha-kunda is completed, there is a tradition that one should take a holy bath in the sacred waters of the two *kundas*. One may alternately sprinkle three drops of sacred *kunda* water on one's head, which is considered by the Vaishnava *acharyas* to be equal to bathing. There are some Vaishnavas who believe that only after performing the full *parikrama* of Radha-kunda, one should take a holy bath in the sacred *kundas*.

END OF RADHA-KUNDA PARIKRAMA

BM.21 GOVARDHANA HILL

After the *parikrama* of Radha-kunda, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama next performs the *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill. In the *Adi-varaha Purana* it says, **"If one performs *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill, he will never have to take birth in this world again."** The *Mathura Mahatmya* says. **"By circumambulating Govardhana Hill after taking *darshana* of Lord Harideva, one will achieve the same result as performing an *ashvamedha* or *rajasuya* sacrifice."** There is a very famous verse from the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* spoken by Shrimati Radharani to the *gopis* of Vraja. **"Of all the devotees, this Govardhana Hill is the best! O my friends, this hill supplies Krishna and Balarama, along with Their calves, cows, and cowherd boyfriends, with all kinds of necessities, like water for drinking, very soft grass, caves, fruits, flowers, and vegetables. In this way the hill offers respects to the Lord. Being touched by the lotus feet of Krishna and Balarama, Govardhana Hill appears very jubilant."** Another verse from the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* says. **"Krishna then assumed an unprecedented huge form to instill faith in the cowherd men, declaring 'I am Govardhana Mountain!' He ate the abundant offerings. Together with the people of Vraja, the Lord bowed down to Govardhana Hill, thus in effect offering obeisance's to Himself. Then He said, "Just see how this hill has appeared in person and bestowed mercy upon us".** Thus the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* reveals that Govardhana Hill is both a manifestation of the Supreme Lord Shri Krishna and simultaneously a great devotee of the Lord.

In the Vedic scriptures, Govardhana Hill is figuratively described as appearing in the form of a peacock with its head tucked in to its side as if it were resting. It's beautiful face is Kusuma-sarovara, its two eyes are Radha-kunda and Shyama-kunda, its mouth is Mukharavinda, its neck is Manasi-ganga, its ears are Gwala-pokhara, and its long tail starts at Balarama-sthali, and its tail-end is at Punchari.

How To Get There: From Vrindavana follow the same directions for Radha-kunda in order to reach the Govardhana *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

The Appearance of Govardhana Hill

There are a number of stories about the appearance of Govardhana Hill mentioned in the various *Puranas*. In the *Garga Samhita* it says that Govardhana Hill formally appeared in the land of Salmali-dwipa, and upon seeing the beauty of the hill, the great sage Pulastya Muni requested Govardhana's father to allow him to take Govardhana to his *ashram* near Kashi, where there were no hills at all, so that the sage could sit on the hill and perform his

meditation. Although Govardhana's father was reluctant to part with his son, not wanting his father to be cursed by the sage, Govardhana agreed to go with the sage on one condition, that if the sage put him down at any place, Govardhana would remain there and go no further. The great saga Pulastya readily agreed to the proposal and by dint of his mystic powers, he suddenly assumed a gigantic form, and after picking-up Govardhana Hill in one hand, headed towards Kashi. During his journey, while passing through the area of Vraja Mandala, by the will of providence the sage suddenly felt the need to relieve himself. Unmindful of his promise, he placed Govardhana Hill on the ground and went to pass urine. When he returned, he tried to pick up Govardhana Hill but the hill was far too heavy for him to lift and he became extremely angry, thinking he had been tricked. Pulastya Muni then pronounced a curse on Govardhana that he would gradually sink into the ground by the depth of a mustard seed every day, until he had completely disappeared.

It is a proven geological fact that Govardhana Hill is slowly sinking beneath the earth and by the end of Kali-*yuga*, the scriptures say that sacred hill will have completely disappeared. At the present time, after five thousand years of the Kali-*yuga* has passed, Govardhana Hill is approximately eight kilometers long, thirty meters wide, and just twenty-five meters at its highest point.

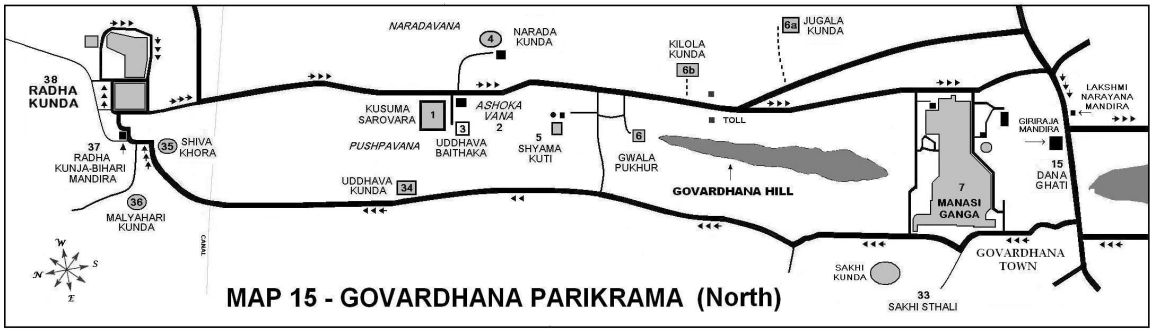
The Lifting of Govardhana Hill

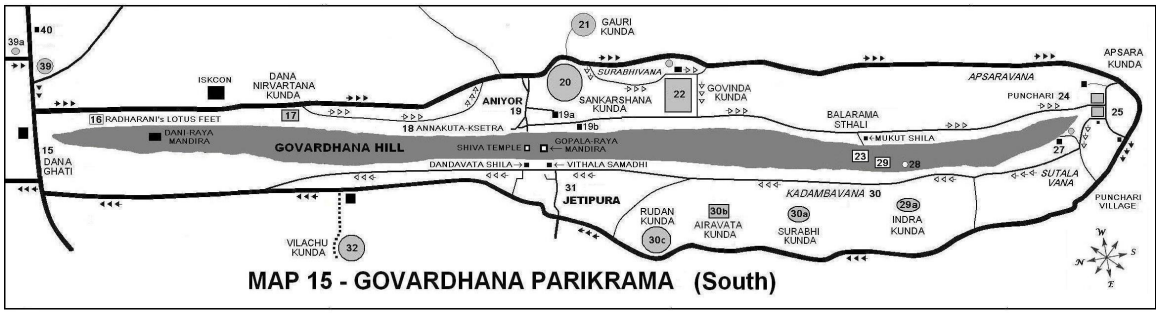
Govardhana Hill is the sacred mountain that was lifted by Krishna in order to save the *Vrajavasis* from the torrential rains sent by Lord Indra, the king of heaven, who wanted to punish the *Vrajavasis* for stopping his worship. Once, Krishna's father Nanda Maharaja was about to perform the annual sacrifice called Indra-*yajna*, by making various offerings to the demigod Indra. However, Krishna strongly objected and suggested that Nanda Maharaja should instead worship Govardhana Hill. Krishna reasoned that it was Govardhana Hill and not Indra, who provided the *Vrajavasis* with all the necessities of life. This includes pasturing grounds and fresh grass for the cows, crystal clear water from the mountain streams for drinking, and wild vegetables and roots for eating. The munificent Govardhana Hill also provided various pigments, minerals, and precious stones, besides a variety of medicinal herbs and the most luxuriant trees that not only provide soothing shade, but also delicious fruits and beautiful sweet smelling flowers. Hearing Krishna's words, Nanda Maharaja was convinced and abandoned the Indra-*yajna*, deciding instead to worship Govardhana Hill.

Realizing that his sacrifice had been stopped by Nanda Maharaja simply on the advice of his talkative little child, Lord Indra became furious with the *Vrajavasis* and decided to punish them by calling for the fearful *samvartaka* rain-clouds of devastation, which appear at the time of the universal dissolution. Suddenly the skies over Vrindavana became darkened by blackish colored clouds and strong winds began to blow, throwing dust and debris into the air. This was followed by loud claps of thunder and deadly streaks of lightening. Then the rain suddenly came down in great torrents almost as thick as pillars, completely inundating the whole area and causing the lakes and rivers to overflow their banks. It appeared that the entire land of Vrindavana, along with all its inhabitants, would be drowned in a great deluge of water.

Krishna understood that the devastating rainfall was caused by Indra, who was attempting to punish the *Vrajavasis* with an exhibition of his so-called mystic powers. At that moment, Krishna decided to teach Indra a lesson and at the same time save the *Vrajavasis* from the danger that was now befalling them. Krishna then immediately lifted Govardhana Hill with His left hand and held it aloft just like an umbrella. The *Vrajavasis* along with their families, livestock, and all their household possessions packed in bullock carts, immediately took shelter from the heavy rainfall under Govardhana Hill. Seeing such an amazing display of power by Krishna, who held the great mountain aloft for seven continuous days without a break, Indra became completely baffled and hopelessly frustrated in his attempt to punish the *Vrajavasis*. In a downcast and despondent mood, having been thoroughly defeated and humiliated by a mere cowherd boy, Indra recalled the *samvartaka* rain-clouds and immediately left for his own abode in the heavenly planets. After the rain subsided, Krishna

replaced Govardhana Hill and all the *Vrajavasis* happily returned to their respective homes, while glorifying Krishna for His heroic deeds in having saved them from the devastating rains.



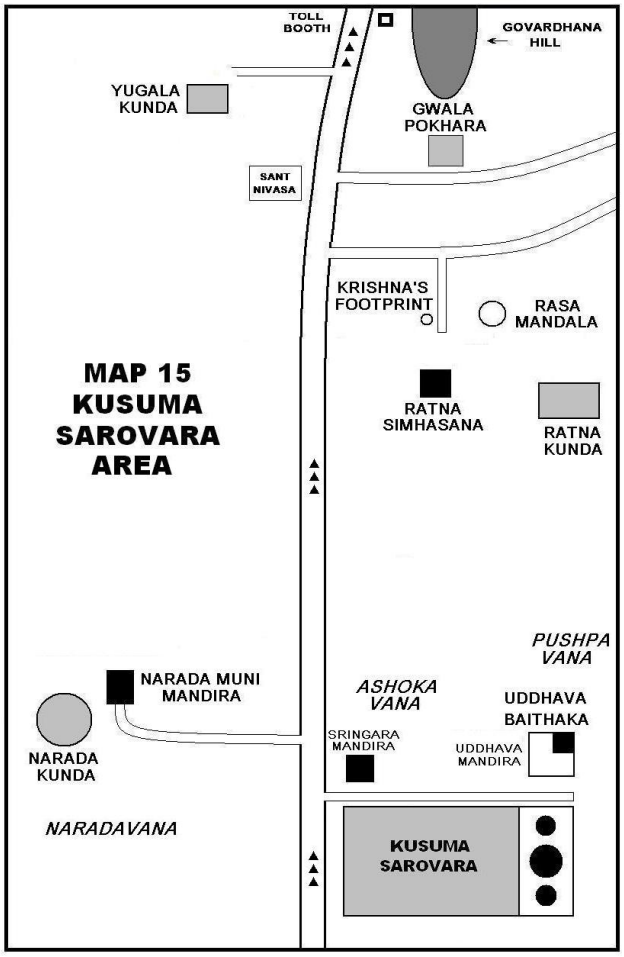


GOVARDHANA PARIKRAMA

The Govardhana *parikrama* can be performed simply by walking around the entire Govardhana Hill without stopping at any particular holy place, or one may choose to stop and visit any holy place of one's choice. While performing the Vraja Mandala Parikrama, it is also not absolutely necessary to perform the full *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill, and one can also perform just a half-*parikrama*, or visit any holy place around Govardhana of one's choice.

G.1 **Kusuma-sarovara**

This is one of the most beautiful and scenic places in the whole of Vraja. This lake is also known as Sumanah-sarovara and is one of the places where Radharani and the *gopis* would bathe and also pick lotus flowers to make garlands for Krishna. The word *'kusuma'* means 'lotus flowers' and *'sarovara'* means a 'lake'. The word *sumanah* also refers to the particular type of lotus flowers that grew in this lake. It is said that one who bathes in Kusuma-sarovara becomes eligible to witness the *ashta-kaliya-lila* or eight-fold daily pastimes of Radha and Krishna. It is said that Narada Muni wanted to witness the *rasa-lila* in Vrindavana, so Vrinda Devi told him to bathe in Kusuma-sarovara, and after doing so; he achieved the body of a *gopi* and was able to enter the *rasa-mandala* to see the *rasa* dance. In the *Vraja-riti-chintamani* it says. "**Simply by once bathing in this Kusuma-sarovara, Narada Muni attained a *gopi* form. This fact is directly confirmed in the words of the enchanting Supreme Personality of Godhead.**" In the year 1515, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu also came here during His *parikrama* of Vraja and took His bath in the sacred *sarovara.*



The palatial monuments on the northern bank of the lake were built by Jawahir Singh, the king of Bharatapura in 1764, as a tribute to his great father Raja Suraj Mal, the most famous Jat warrior in Indian history. The main building is actually the *samadhi* of Suraja Mal and contains his ashes; the two buildings on either side are the *samadhis* of his two queens whose ashes are also entombed there. The ceilings are decorated with paintings from Krishna-*lila* as well as the heroic exploits of Suraj Mal. It is said that Ashtavakra Muni did penance here at Kusuma-sarovara while waiting for the appearance of Radha and Krishna. One day he had the *darshana* of the 'divine couple' enjoying pastimes on the banks of the lake and immediately gave up his body. His *samadhi* is said to be near the old Shiva temple on the western bank of the lake.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15A)
(see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.2 Ashokavana / Pushpavana

The *Puranas* say that both Ashokavana and Pushpavana, which border each other at this place on the banks of Kusuma-sarovara, are *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama. In this small forest of *ashoka* trees, the delightful pastime of *shringara-vihara* took place where Krishna combed Radha's hair and decorated Her body with cosmetics, ornaments, and jewels. Near the main road one can see a small temple commemorating the pastimes of *shringara-vihara* that took place here near the banks of Kusuma-sarovara. The word '*shringara*' means 'decoration' and '*vihara*' means 'pastime'. In the nearby forest of Pushpavana that once surrounded the northern bank of Kusuma-sarovara, Radharani and the *gopis* would come to pick flowers; Krishna would also come there to pick a quarrel with the Radha, accusing Her of stealing flowers from Cupid's private garden. Pushpavana is also

a name of Kamadeva, the transcendental Cupid, while the *ashoka* tree is also associated with Kamadeva because its flowers are used to decorate Kamadeva's '*pushpavana'* or flower-arrow of love.

The transcendental loving exchanges and joking word between Radha and Krishna that took place in the forest of Pushpavana are as follows;
Krishna: "Who is picking flowers?"
Radha: "No one but Me."
Krishna: "Who are You?"
Radha: "Don't you know Me?"
Krishna: "If I knew You I wouldn't ask."
Radha: "I don't care if You don't know Me, why don't You leave this place?"
Krishna: "I am the gardener here, where will I go?"
Radha: "If You are a male bee, then go to the female bee."
Krishna: "You are the female bee."
Radha: "You appear to be an honest man and also an ascetic, but You know the art of stealing a young girl's heart. Aren't You ashamed of Yourself?"
Krishna: "My dear lady, Maharaja Kandarpa (Cupid) is the king of this forest; because he is pleased with Me, he has delegated to Me all his power. If You are so proud I will confiscate all Your flowers. O pretty lady, I am a *brahmachari* and an ascetic. It appears to Me that You have come here simply to try and entice Me with Your beauty. But do not think I am alone here in the jungle. My friends are always close by. Please don't play any tricks with Me, and just behave like an honest person. Anyway, Your bodily actions speak louder than any words. You are simply trying to capture the Maharaja Kandarpa's property and every limb of Your body is just like a thief. Don't think that just because You are a lady You will be pardoned. I would be committing a great wrong if I pardoned You. When I take You before the Maharaja, You will be sentenced with various punishments. At that time Your vanity will vanish. Without permission You have picked flowers, and I have no authority to pardon You. You are thinking that this is just an ordinary forest and the king is not very powerful because his kingdom is so small, but You will see, because you have robbed this kingdom You will be punished."

"With the different parts of Your body You have stolen different things; the palms of Your hands and the soles of Your feet have stolen the beauty of the petals of the lotus flowers; Your gait – the baby elephants and swans; Your nails – the mirrors; Your knees – golden balls; Your hips – the golden banana trees; the upper part of Your waist – the golden altar; Your navel – the lake of nectar; Your chest – the bed of Cupid; Your fingers – the flowers of Cupid, which is the source of his power; Your teeth – have stolen the pearl necklace, and Your eyes – the deer and the *Chakora* bird; the lines on Your neck – the couch; and the lines on Your stomach – the gentle waves of the Yamuna; You have stolen so many things, how can the Maharaja pardon You? The beauty of our kingdom is unique in all the world. Today You have robbed everything, including our prestige."
Radha : "O Krishna, You are very clever. You are the greatest thief; now You are acting like a saint and calling others thieves. What can be said of You? When You stole the clothes of the *gopis*, Your character was apparent. Those poor naked *gopis* were standing before You with folded hands and You were simply enjoying the fun. There is no better example of Your honesty. O Krishna, there are many girls of marriageable age and You are a young prince, but nobody is willing to give his daughter to You. There must be a good reason. It is highly probable that You are not a normal man, and no girl will like to marry an abnormal man. My dear Krishna, I fully understand that it is not out of choice, but out of force that You have become a *brahmachari*. O Krishna, You are in the habit of playing Your flute, which has the power of attracting all the young girls. Shameful! How dare You call Yourself a *brahmachari*. In fact, it is very wicked and sinful that You call Yourself a *brahmachari* and then tempt young girls. Now don't come one step closer to Me, please! It is most surprising that considering You have not planted even a single tree in this whole forest, that You are now claiming ownership. The entire forest has been destroyed by Your cows trampling here and there. Our dear friend Vrinda Devi has taken great pains to keep this forest clean and tidy.

Therefore we call it Vrindavana, and Vrinda has given it to me and it is now My playground. There is a sign on the path, which says 'Ladies only.' We are simply picking flowers to worship the Sun god. Who are You to stop us? This place belongs to us. O *brahmachari*, males are strictly prohibited. How dare You set foot here! Now off with You, go and take care of Your cows."

Radha then threatened Krishna that She would call Lalita, whom She said was very powerful. At that moment Radha's friend Visakha intervened in the quarrel and, catching hold of the corner of Radha's cloth, immediately tied it to Krishna's *dhoti*. She then informed the 'Divine Couple' that it was now time for Them to leave Pushpavana and move on to Radha-kunda to take part in Their midday pastimes with the *gopis* on the banks of the sacred *kunda*.

How To Get There: This forest is on the western bank of Kusuma-sarovara (see map no. 15 & 15A)

G.3 **Uddhava Baithaka**

This beautiful spot on the banks of Kusama-sarovara was the favorite place where Krishna's very dear friend Uddhava used to sit while performing his *bhajana*. Uddhava was so moved by the pure devotion exhibited by the *gopis* that he desired to be born as grass in Vrindavana, so that when the *gopis* were passing by, they might trample upon him and in that way he could get the dust of their lotus feet upon his head. This is actually the place in the Pushpavana forest where Uddhava took birth in the form of a grassy-creeper known as *gulma-lata*. There is a temple here dedicated to Uddhava and it is believed that Vajranabha Maharaja established this temple and deity of Uddhava. It is said that Uddhava eternally lives in three places; Badrinatha in the Himalayas, at Krishna's former capital city of Dwaraka, and here at Kusuma-sarovara.

How To Get There: This place is on the north-western bank of Kusuma-sarovara (see map no. 15 & 15A)

G.4 **Naradavana / Narada-kunda**

This is the spot where the Shrila Narada Muni performed *tapasya* on the advice of Vrinda Devi, and the place where he is said to have written his famous *Narada-bhakti-sutras* explaining the science of devotional service. Naradavana is also mentioned in the *Puranas* to be one of the *upavanas* of Vrindavana. There is a temple here next to the *kunda* where the deity of Narada Muni can be seen. One day while he was engaged in *tapasya*, Narada noticed Vrinda Devi passing by with some of her girlfriends and he humbly begged her to bless him so he might enter the *rasa-mandala* to witness the *rasa*-dance. Vrinda Devi informed him that he should first take bath at Kusuma-sarovara, after which his desire would be fulfilled. After bathing in the sacred Kusama-sarovara, Narada immediately achieved the form of a *gopi* and was able to enter the *rasa-mandala* to see the *rasa*-dance between Radha and Krishna

How To Get There: This place is 100mt on the left of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15A)

G.5 **Shyama Kuti / Shyamavana**

The small forest of Shyamavana is where the sacred rocks of Govardhana Hill first appear above the ground and also one of the places where Radha and Krishna performed *rasa-lila* pastimes with the *gopis*. On one of the small rocks here one can see what is believed to be Krishna's footprints along with the hoof-prints of a calf. The place known as Shyama Kuti is famous because at this place, while surrounded by hundreds of her girlfriends, Shrimati Radharani would sit in audience on a gem encrusted throne decorated with diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, known as the Ratna-simhasana. The word *'ratna'* means 'gemstones'. Nearby is Ratna-kunda where the *gopis* used to bathe and also a *rasa-mandala* platform commemorating the *rasa*-dance that took place here.

This is the also the place where the demon Shankachuda attempted to kidnap some of the *gopis* right in front of Krishna and Balarama. The demon was a follower of Kuvera and famous for wearing an extremely precious conch shaped gemstone on his head, and for this reason he was known to everyone as Shankhachuda. The word *'shankha'* means a 'conch shell'. One evening, the *gopis* had gathered at Shyamavana on the occasion of *Holi-mela* and

were raptly listening to Krishna and Balarama singing a beautiful song together when the Shankhachuda demon suddenly appeared there. The demon began herding together a number of the *gopis* and led them away just like sheep. Seeing what had happened, Krishna and Balarama immediately chased after the demon and very soon caught up with him. Seeing Krishna and Balarama close on his heels, Shankhachuda released the *gopis* in the hope of making good his escape and began running as fast as he could. Krishna told Balarama to stay with the *gopis* while He would continue to pursue the demon. Eventually, Krishna caught up with Shankhachuda and beat him so hard on his head, the demon dropped dead on the spot. Krishna then removed the precious conch-shaped gemstone from his head and after returning to where Balarama and the *gopis* were waiting, presented this precious gemstone to Balarama as a gift.

How To Get There: This place is 500mt to the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15BA)

G.6 **Gwala Pokhara**

The word *'gwala'* or *'gowala'* means a 'cowherd boy', and the word *'pokhara'* means a 'small pond' or 'pool'. This is where Krishna and Balarama along with the cowherd boys often ate their lunch while they were herding their cows near Govardhana Hill. From Gwala Pokhara, Krishna would often slip away unseen by the cowherd boys and meet Radharani and the *gopis* at Kusuma-sarovara.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 500mt to the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15A)

G.6a **Yugala-kunda**

This *kunda* is a short distance from the *parikrama* path and is the place where Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men had camped when they were on their way from Shakatikara to Dig. After staying at Dig for some time they then moved to Kamyavana and then finally to Nandagram, which became Nanda Maharaja's permanent residence.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is about40mt to the left of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15A)

G.6b **Kilola-kunda**

This *kunda* is a short distance from the *parikrama* path and is one of the places where Radha and Krishna used to enjoy swimming and sporting in the water along with Their friends.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is at least 500mt from the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.7 **Manasi-ganga**

This lake is said to have been created from Krishna's mind after He had killed the demon Vatsasura. Because the demon was in the form of a calf, and it is considered very sinful to kill a calf, the cowherd boys suggested Krishna could purify Himself by bathing in the River Ganges. Not wishing to leave Vrindavana, while at the same time satisfying His cowherd boyfriends, Krishna created the River Ganges from His own mind and manifested it here at Govardana Hill. He then took His bath much to the pleasure of His cowherd boyfriends. The word *'manasi'* means 'from the mind' and *'ganga'* means the 'River Ganges'.

Sometime later, when Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men heard descriptions about the glories of bathing in the Ganges, they wanted to go and take bath in that holy river. After much persuasion however, Krishna convinced the *Vrajavasis* that the River Ganges was manifested in Vrindavana and brought them here to Manasi-ganga. When Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men arrived there with Krishna, Ganga Mayi, the river goddess, suddenly appeared from the lake and standing before them, offered prayers to Krishna. Having seen mother Ganga with their own eyes, they were convinced that Manasi-ganga was non-different from the River Ganges, and they joyfully took their bath in the sacred lake.

Manasi-ganga is also the site of some of Krishna's celebrated boating pastimes known as *nauka-vihara*. Formerly Manasi-ganga was much larger and many boats used to ply from one side to the other. One day, the *gopis* arrived there with their milk products meant for sale in a local market on the other side of the lake. There were no boats available

other than one very old boat, so the *gopis* enquired from the young boatman dressed in a cloak with a peacock feather in his hair, how much he would charge. After some haggling, the boatman agreed to accept some milk products as his fee. The *gopis* boarded the boat and the boatman began rowing to the opposite shore. All of a sudden the boatman stopped rowing and lying back, informed the *gopis* that due to weakness, he was unable to go any further unless he was immediately fed with some of their milk products. At first the *gopis* refused to hand over any milk products until they reached the other side, but realizing they had no other option, fed a quantity of their milk sweets to the boatman.

After being fed, the boatman continued rowing for some time but again stopped, this time saying that after eating so many milk products, he would have to rest for some time. The boatman suggested that it would help if two *gopis* could massage his legs and another two could massage his arms. The *gopis* became very angry with the boatman, saying they would certainly take hold of his arms and legs, but instead throw him overboard into the lake. Seeing the angry mood of the *gopis*, the boatman again started rowing but after some time, suddenly pointed to a hole in the boat's hull through which water was steadily leaking into the boat. The boatman informed the *gopis* that due to the heavy weight of all their milk products, the boat would surely sink unless they threw all their pots into the water. Fearing they may drown, the *gopis* immediately threw all their milk products overboard. The boatman then said that there was still too much weight in the boat and if they were to survive, the *gopis* would have to throw all their heavy jewelry overboard also. The *gopis* then removed all their jewelry and threw that into the water as well.

Suddenly dark clouds enveloped the whole sky as strong winds began to blow causing large waves to batter the boat. By this time the *gopis* were completely terrified, in order to assure them that the boat was sturdy enough to withstand the stormy conditions, the boatman demonstrated the strength of his boat by rocking it back and forth. As soon as the boatman started rocking the boat, in great fear that She might fall overboard, Radharani suddenly leapt forward and thrust Her arms around the boatman's neck for safety. At that moment the storm subsided and the wind stopped blowing. As soon as Radharani touched the boatman, She immediately understood that the boatman was non-other than Her beloved Krishna. Seeing Radharani embracing the boatman, the *gopis* were surprised and enquired what on earth was She doing. Radharani then pulled the flute from under Krishna's belt and held it up for all the *gopis* to see. The *gopis* then started laughing and clapping their

hands in great delight. Krishna then took them on a boat-ride to see all the beautiful places around Manasi-ganga.

During His *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala, Lord Chaitanya also bathed in Manasi-ganga before entering the Harideva Mandira for *darshana*. There is a tradition amongst *Vrajavasis* and pilgrims in general, which has also been mentioned in Rupa Gosvami's *Mathura-mahatmya*, that those who are performing Govardhana *parikrama* should first bathe in Manasi-ganga and then take *darshana* of Lord Harideva, after which they start Govardhana *parikrama*. Then after finishing Govardhana *parikrama*, many pilgrims also take bath once again in Manasi-ganga.

How To Get There: Manasi–ganga is on the left of the main *parikrama* path when entering Govardhana Town (see map no. 15 & 16B)

G.8 **Harideva Mandira**

When Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came to this temple, He chanted the holy names of Krishna and danced for hours in ecstasy in front of the deity. Large crowds gathered to see Lord Chaitanya and everyone was amazed at His ecstatic love for Krishna. This deity of Lord Harideva is one of the four *Deva-murtis* of Vraja and was originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja, who installed a total of four *Deva-vigrahas* in Vraja including; Harideva at Govardhana, Govindadeva at Vrindavana, Keshavadeva at Mathura, and Baladeva at Mahavana It is said that this deity of Lord Harideva was established here because of the pastime where Radharani and the *gopis* had been waiting for Krishna to meet them at Manasi-ganga and began to feel great anxiety because Krishna had not arrived. Hoping that Krishna would soon arrive there, the *gopis* began chanting over and over again, 'Harideva! Harideva! Harideva!' Suddenly, a beautiful deity of Lord Harideva holding Govardhana Hill in his left hand and a flute in His right hand appeared there before them. The *gopis* were ecstatic and immediately began worshiping that transcendental form of Lord Harideva, the lifter of Govardhana Hill.

The temple of Harideva that can be seen today was built by Maharaja Bhagavana Singh, a former king of Jaipura and Raja Man Singh's father. During the despotic rule of the Mughal tyrant Aurangzeb, the deity of Lord Harideva was moved elsewhere for safety and presently the *pratibhu-murti* can be seen in this temple. The original deity of Lord Harideva is presently being worshiped at Badhauli village near the town of Rasadhan in the Kanpur District of Uttar Pradesh. .

How To Get There: This temple is 50mt from the western bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.9 **Manasi Devi Mandira**

Manasi Devi is the presiding deity of Manasi-ganga and is seen here in her form as goddess Durga, riding upon her tiger carrier. All the forms of the various Devis or demigoddesses of the 'Hindu pantheon' have their origin in Durga Devi, who is a direct manifestation of Yogamaya Devi, the internal potency of Lord Krishna. There are four important temples of Devi in Vraja that were established by Vajranabha Maharaja, and they are all expansions of Krishna's sister Yogamaya Devi, who is also called Ekanamsa. The names of these deities are; Manasi Devi at Govardhana, Vrinda Devi at Kamyavana, Pateleshvara Devi at Mathura, and Yogamaya Devi at the Govinda-sthala in Vrindavana.

There is another goddess called Manasa Devi, also called Naga Devi, who is a Nagin and considered to be the dual daughter of Lord Shiva and the king of serpents Vasuki. The worship of Manasa Devi is very popular with women all over India who worship the goddess in order to protect their families from poisonous snakes and also by young unmarried girls in order to obtain a good husband.

How To Get There: This temple is 20mt from the western bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.10 **Brahma-kunda**

In the *Adi-varaha Purana* it is said. **"After bathing here, Brahma satisfied Lord Hari, Indra and other planetary rulers created other lakes nearby"**. It is said that Lord Brahma performed an *abhisheka* of Lord Harideva when he sought forgiveness after having dared to steal the Lord's cows and cowherd boyfriends. The accumulated water from that *abhisheka* formed this *kunda* and Brahma then took his bath in it. There were previously four other *kundas* situated around Brahma-kunda created by other demigods including; Yamaraja, Kuvera, Varuna, and Indra, which have since disappeared. The *Adi-varaha Purana* says that north of Brahma-kunda is Kuvera-tirtha, in the east is Indra-tirtha, in the south is Yamaraja-tirtha, and in the west is Varuna-tirtha. The same *Purana* also says that surrounding Brahma-kunda were many beautiful forest groves and over fourteen auspicious holy places where Krishna enjoyed His transcendental pastimes.

It is said that Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rested here when He visited Manasi-ganga while on *parikrama* of Vraja. Lord Nityananda also rested here during His journey through Vraja a few years before Lord Chaitanya's own *parikrama*. While Lord Nityananda was here He revealed His transcendental form as Balarama to a local *brahmana* who was a great devotee to Lord Balarama.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the western bank of Manasi-ganga just in front of Manasi Devi Mandira (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.11 **Mukharavinda**

According to Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami, this is the original Mukharavinda-*shila*, or lotus mouth of Govardhana. The word *'mukha'* means 'mouth' and *'aravinda'* means 'lotus'. The word '*shila'* means one of the 'rocks' from Govardhana Hill. At this temple pilgrims make offerings of milk, yogurt, and sweets to the lotus mouth of Govardhana Hill. There are a number of other so-called *Mukharavinda-shilas* around Govardhana hill, but they are not situated at the correct place to be recognized as the actual lotus mouth of Giri-Govardhana, and are therefore not considered to be the original *Mukharavinda*. Situated just behind the *Mukharavinda-shila* is the *Mukut-shila*, where the impression of Krishna's crown can be seen on a rock from Govardhana Hill.

How To Get There: This temple is on the eastern bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.12 **Chakra-tirtha**

This is the place where Lord Vishnu's personal weapon, the Sudarshana-*chakra* came to rest on the bank of Manasi-ganga. It is said that as long as Krishna held aloft Govardhana Hill, the fiery Sudarshana-*chakra* was situated in the sky helping to dissipate the deluge of rainwater with its intense heat. Once the rain had stopped, the heat from the Sudarshana-*chakra* helped in evaporating all the floodwater. After the water had gone, Lord Vishnu's *chakra* weapon personified Sudarshana, did not want to leave Vraja and humbly requested Krishna to let him stay at near Manasi-ganga, Krishna agreed to his request and he came to reside at this place which then became known as Chakra-tirtha, the resting place of the Sudarshana-*chakra*.

Also located at Chakra-tirtha is the landing place known as Paranga Ghata, where Krishna's boat used to be moored. From this place, Radharani and the *gopis* used to go for boat-rides with Krishna during the many ecstatic *nauka-vihara* pastimes on Manasi-ganga. Vajranabha Maharaja also established the deity of Lord Shiva here at Chakra-tirtha, which is one of the famous *dig-pala* deities known as Chakreshwara Mahadava.

How To Get There: This place is on the western bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.13 **Sanatana Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

In the last years of his life, Shrila Sanatana Goswami came to stay at Chakra-tirtha and his *bhajana kutira* is situated next to the Chakreshwara Mahadeva Mandira. Even in old age Sanatana Goswami would perform the twenty-four mile *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill every day. One day, a very beautiful cowherd boy met Sanatana while he was out on his daily *parikrama* and suggested to him that because he was now very old, he should not undergo such an arduous task of performing *parikrama* around Govardhana every day. Out of

concern for Sanatana, the cowherd boy climbed Govardhana Hill and returned with a rock that had Krishna's lotus foot print upon it, along with the hoof print of one of Krishna's calves. The cowherd boy handed the rock to Sanatana, saying that he should simply circumambulate this sacred Govardhana-*sila* seven times every day and it would be equal to performing the entire *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill. Later in a dream it was revealed to Sanatana that the cowherd boy was actually Lord Krishna. Sanatana thoroughly condemned himself, that although Krishna had personally appeared before him and presented him with the Govardhana-*sila*, he was unable to recognize his beloved Lord. Sanatana began circumambulating the Govardhana-*sila* every day as Krishna had requested him to do.

It was Sanatana Goswamis intention to spend the rest of his days performing *bhajana* at Chakra Tirtha, but due to being pestered day and night by mosquitoes, he decided he should move. At that time, Chakreswara Mahadeva (Lord Shiva), appeared there in the guise of a *brahmana* and requested Sanatana to stay, saying that from that day forth mosquitoes would no longer cause him any disturbance. Hearing the humble plea of the *brahmana*, Sanatana remained there and found that he was no longer plagued by mosquitoes.

Sometime later, on the occasion of *Guru-purnima*, all the Vaishnava devotees had gathered at Sanatana's *bhajana kutira* at Chakra-tirtha, because on the occasion of *Guru-purnima*, he always led the devotees on the annual *maha-parikrama* around Govardhana Hill. However, after patiently waiting for some time, Sanatana failed to emerge from his *kutira*. When the devotees looked inside, they saw Sanatana quietly sitting cross-legged with his hand in his bead bag, when he did not respond to their enquiries; the devotees suddenly realized he had in fact left his body. The passing of Sanatana Goswami was a terrible loss to everyone, because he was so dearly beloved by all the Vaishnava devotees, as well as the people of Vraja. The devotees carried Sanatana Goswami's body in a procession from Chakra-tirtha to Dwadasaditya Tila in Vrindavana, and placed his sacred body in *samadhi* near to the place where his beloved deity Madana-mohana was being worshiped. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Sanatana Goswami was the *gopi* known as Rati-manjari in Krishna-*lila*

How To Get There: This Bhajana Kutira is on the western bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.14 **Chakreshwara Mahadeva Mandira (Chakaleshwara Mahadeva)**

This is one of the famous *dig-pala* deities established by Vajranabha Maharaja that protect the holy Dhama. The word *'dig'* means 'directions' and *'pala'* means protector. The other *dig-pala* deities established by Vajranabha include; Bhuteshwara in Mathura, Kameshwara in Kamyavana, and Gopishwara in Vrindavana. Sometimes Nandishwara at Nandagrama is included in the list of *dig-pala* deities. (This deity of Lord Shiva is called by local Vrajavasis as Chakaleshwara Mahadeva, which is a corruption of Chakreshwara).

How To Get There: This temple is on the eastern bank of Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15 & 15B)

G.15 **Dana Ghati / Krishna-vedi**

This is the narrow gorge or pathway (*ghati*) that passes through Govardhana Hill, that is famous as the place where Krishna and His cowherd boyfriends would stop the *gopis* and demanded a tax (*dana*). The *gopis* were taking their milk products to the market and if they refused to pay the tax, then they would have to walk a very long distance to find the next pathway across the mountain. Usually, after much haggling, the *gopis* would give some of their milk products to Krishna and His friends as a tax, and then they would be allowed to pass through the gorge. The pastime of collecting tax from the *gopis* is known as *dana-keli-lila*. Although the *gopis* would regularly use this same pathway or *ghati* in order to cross Govardhana Hill, due to the influence of *yogamaya*, they would forget about the previous day's pastime of being forced to pay a tax to Krishna and His boyfriends.

How To Get There: Dana Ghati is to the right of the main *parikrama* path in the centre of Govardhana Town exactly where the Mathura road passes over Govardhana Hill (see map no. 15)

G.16 **Radharani's Lotus Footprint**

At Dana Ghati on a large rock next to Govardhana Hill, one can see what is believed to be the impression of Radharani's lotus footprint. This place is very popular with pilgrims who circumambulate this Govardhana-*sila* and make offerings of milk and sweets. Some say that Krishna's footprint can also be seen here.

How To Get There: This footprint is on the right of the *parikrama* path after leaving Dana Ghati (see map no. 15)

G.17 **Dana-nirvartana-kunda**

This is another place where the tax-collection or *dana-keli* pastimes took place. One day, when the *gopis* were going to Govinda-kunda with a large stock of milk products that were to be used in a great sacrifice being performed by the local *brahmanas* headed by Bhaguri Rishi, Krishna and the cowherd boys blocked their path and demanded a tax, but the *gopis* flatly refused and an argument ensued with each side making rude remarks about the other. Eventually the cowherd boys decided that the *gopis* could take their milk products to Govinda-kunda, but only after the *gopis* had promised to return the next day (*nivartana*) and pay the tax (*dana*). The next day, as the cowherd boys were waiting on the banks of Dana-nirvartana-kunda for the *gopis* to arrive and pay the tax, suddenly hundreds of *gopis* descended from all directions and in a furious mood they caught hold of Krishna and His boyfriends. The *gopis* then tied them all to trees and gave each of them a thorough tongue lashing and some of the cowherd boys who had passed rude remarks about the *gopis* received a few good slaps as well. The *gopis* then demanded a tax from Krishna because His cows were eating all the grass from around Govardhana Hill.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.18 **Annakuta-ksetra**

This is where the famous *annakuta* festival was held when the *Vrajavasis* led by Nanda Maharaja, prepared hundreds of wonderful preparations and offered a great feast to Giriraja Maharaja, as part of their Govardhana Puja ceremony. The word '*annakuta'* means an offering to the deity of 'cooked grains'.

How To Get There: This place is on the inner *parikrama* path between Dana-nirvartana-kunda and Aniyora Village. (see map no. 15)

G.19 **Aniyora**

This village received its name during the *annakuta* festival when all the *Vrajavasis* led by Nanda Maharaja worshiped Govardhana Hill. The word '*anna*' means 'rice' as well as other grains, and in this particular case, refers to rice-based vegetable preparations, as well as other grain-based foodstuffs like *puris, paratas, halava, laddus, jallebis, ksira* and also many varieties of sweets and cakes. Krishna then exhibited His mystic powers and assumed a gigantic form of the personified Govardhana Hill named Giriraja Maharaja, the 'King of all Mountains', and after sitting down on the ground, He ate the many thousands of offerings prepared by the *Vrajavasis*. While eating this wonderful *annakuta* feast, Giriraja Maharaja was enjoying the food so much that He kept snapping His fingers and happily saying, *"Aniyora! Aniyora! "* Or in other words, "Bring more! Bring more!" The *Vrajavasis* were very happy that Giriraja Maharaja had Himself appeared before them just to accept their offerings, and they continued cooking and kept bringing more and more food until Giriraja Maharaja was fully satisfied. After Giriraja Maharaja disappeared from the scene, Krishna led all the *Vrajavasis* and their cows on *parikrama* around Govardhana Hill.

In this village is the Prakata-sthali, or the appearance place where Madhavendra Puri discovered the deity of Lord Gopala. Madhavendra Puri then he arranged for Lord Gopala to be installed on the top of Govardhana Hill. A temple was later built there for the deity which is known as the Gopala Raya Mandira. During the despotic Mohammedan rule in India, Lord Gopala was moved to the safety of Nathadwara in Rajasthan and became famous as Shri Nathaji. At the present time a Govardhana-*shila* is being worshiped in the Gopala Raya Mandira on top of Govardhana Hill.

How To Get There: This village is located on the outer *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.19a **Sankarshana Mandira (Dauji Mandira)**

This ancient deity of Lord Sankarshana is said to have been established by Vajranabha Maharaja. The deity is also known locally as Dauji, meaning the elder brother of Krishna. Standing next to Dauji one can see the small deity of Dauli's younger brother Krishna.

How To Get There: This temple is located inside Aniyora Village (see map no. 15)

G.19b **Gopala Prakata Sthala**

This is the appearance place of Lord Gopala, the deity that was discovered by Srila Madhavendra Puri Goswami. The word *'prakata'* means 'appearance' or 'manifested' and *'sthala'* means a holy place. The deity of Lord Gopala lay buried in the earth beneath some bushes at this very spot and in a dream the deity appeared before Madhavendra Puri and requested that Madhavendra should dig Him out, because He was suffering from neglect and the onslaught of the elements like cold, wind, rain, and scorching heat. In the dream the Gopala deity told Madhavandra to install Him in a nice temple on top of Govardhana Hill. This same Gopala deity was one of the two *'natha-vigrahas'* that were established by Vajranabha Maharaja, the other being Lord Gopinatha which he installed in Vrindavana. The word '*natha*' means 'master' or 'controller'. This Gopala deity is also known as Gopala-raya, Gopalanatha, and also Shrinatha. During the period of Aurangzeb, the despotic Mughal ruler, the deity was moved to the safety of Rajasthana and is presently being worshiped at Nathadwara near Udaipura in Rajasthana.

How To Get There: This Sthala is located inside Aniyora Village (see map no. 15)

G.20 **Sankarshana-kunda**

This *kunda* is named after Lord Balarama whose name is also Sankarshana. The *Adi-varaha Purana* says that one who bathes here will be freed from the sin of killing a cow. Once during a raid by Mohammedan soldiers, the deity of Lord Sankarashana from the Sankarshana Mandira at Aniyora was hidden in this *kunda* until the danger had passed.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the outer *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.21 **Gauri-kunda / Gauri Tirtha**

The holy place near Govardhana Hill known as Gauri Tirtha and it was the playground of Chandravali, Radha's cousin and bitter rival in achieving Krishna's love and affection. There was a continual battle going on between these two cousins as to who could please Krishna the most. At Gauri Tirtha, Chandravali regularly performed *puja* at the Gauri Mandira and Krishna would go there on some occasions to meet with Chandravali and enjoy her company. The area around Chandra-sarovara, which also included Gauri Tirtha, was very dear to Chandravali and was one of her favorite places.

One day, after hearing rumors that Radha was having a secret love-affair with Krishna, Abhimanyu, and Radha's supposed husband, approached Paurnamasi for her blessings to send Radha away to Mathura. Paurnamasi informed Abhimanyu that simply on the strength of rumors, he should not resort to such a drastic action, saying that if he himself caught Radha and Krishna together, then only could he contemplate sending Radha away. In order to further pacify Abhimanyu, Paurnamasi informed him that from that very day, she would initiate Radha into the worship of the Goddess Gauri, so that Abhimanyu could gain more wealth and increase the number of his cows. Abhimanyu became very happy at the thought of such an increase in his wealth, as he had heard that after Chandravalli began worshiping Gauri Devi, the wealth of her husband Govardhana Malla had suddenly increased.

After being instructed by Purnamasi, Radharani went to Gauri Tirtha to perform Gauri-*puja*. Krishna, wanting to enjoy some fun, also went there and just to tease Radharani, He deliberately addressed Her as Chandravali, Radha's cousin and rival. In an angry huff, Radharani refused to talk to Krishna and immediately ran off to pick flowers for the Gauri-*puja*. Krishna began thinking what He could do to pacify Radha's angry pique and regain Her association. At that moment, Krishna's friend Madhumangala arrived there bringing all the

dresses, ornaments, sandal paste, and various cosmetics for the worship of goddess Gauri. Krishna then decided to dress up in the deities clothing and disguise Himself as a girl by applying cosmetics to His face, He could then secretly approach Radharani and pacify her anger. Krishna requested Vrinda Devi to support Him and say that He was her fair complexioned sister whose name was Nikunjavidya. Vrinda Devi agreed and Krishna entered the Gauri Mandira to decorate His face and dress-up as a girl.

Very soon Radharani arrived at the Gauri Mandira accompanied by Lalita and Vishakha, and on seeing Vrinda Devi, asked her where Krishna had gone. Vrinda replied that He was last seen in the temple talking to her sister Nikunjavidya, but had now gone elsewhere. Radha and Her friends immediately went to the temple to see for themselves and to meet Vrinda's 'sister' Nikunjavidya. Immediately upon seeing Vrinda's beautiful fair complexioned sister, Radha informed Vrinda, that just by seeing her sister Nikunjavidya smiling at Her, She was automatically feeling intense love towards her. Being completely overcome with affection, Radha placed Her arms around Nikunjavidya and embraced her. Nikunjavidya in-turn embraced Radharani and began passionately kissing Radha's beautiful lotus-like face. At that moment Radha realized the true identity of Vrinda's so-called 'sister'. Lalita and Vishakha were surprised and somewhat embarrassed to see Vrinda's sister so unabashedly embracing Radharani and kissing Her face, but at that moment also realized Nikunjavidya's true identity.

Having heard a rumor that Radha and Krishna were meeting secretly at Gauri-kunda, without any warning, Jatila suddenly arrived there with Abhimanyu hoping to catch Radha and Krishna red-handed. Shocked at hearing Abhimanu's voice as he entered the temple with his mother, Radhrani immediately fainted on the floor in front of 'Nikunjavidya'. On entering the temple, Jatila saw Radharani lying prostrate before Nikunjavidya and asked Abhimanyu, who was the attractive and fair complexioned girl who illuminated the whole temple with here dazzling and effulgent beauty. Abhimanyu replied that it must surely be the goddess Gauri. Lalita and Vishakha quickly spoke up saying that while Radharani was engaged in worshiping the goddess, out of her mercy, the goddess has stepped out of the deity and was now standing before them. Jatila then asked Lalita what Radharani was praying for. All of a sudden the goddess began to speak in a very grave voice, saying, 'the pure and faultless Radha was praying to save Abhimanyu from a great calamity hanging over his head'. Vrinda then immediately intervened saying that after two days, King Kamsa was planning to make a human sacrifice to Lord Shiva and had decided that Abhimanyu was to be the sacrificial man-animal, but due to Radha's great love and devotion towards the goddess Gauri, the danger has now been averted. Abhimanyu immediately bowed down and profusely thanked the goddess for saving him, promising that he would never ever think of taking Radharani to Mathura, but instead would insist that She came every single day to Gauri Tirtha to worship and serve goddess Gauri. Abhimanyu and his mother then left the temple thinking what great fortune had been bestowed upon them by Radha's great devotion to Gauri Devi.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies about 200mt south of Sankarshana-kunda by walking across agricultural fields (see map no. 15)

G.22 **Govinda-kunda**

In the *Mathura Mahatmya* it is said. "**The sacred Govinda-kunda has been created at the place where Lord Krishna was bathed by the enemy of the Yadus named Indra. It is filled with the water that washed Krishna's body. Just by taking bath there one attains liberation."** This sacred *kunda* was created when Lord Indra performed an elaborate *abhisheka* of Shri Krishna with water from the celestial River Ganges. This happened after Krishna had defeated Indra by lifting Govardhana Hill to save the *Vrajavasis* from the devastating rains sent by Indra to punish the *Vrajavasis*. After Indra had performed the *abhisheka* of Krishna, the demigods headed by Brahma and Shiva also bathed Krishna and then performed an elaborate *aratrika* ceremony with ghee lamps, incense, *chamaras*, and various other paraphernalia. Lord Brahma then crowned Krishna as Govinda, the Lord of the cows. Shrila Jiva Gosvami has said that because all the demigods reside within the body

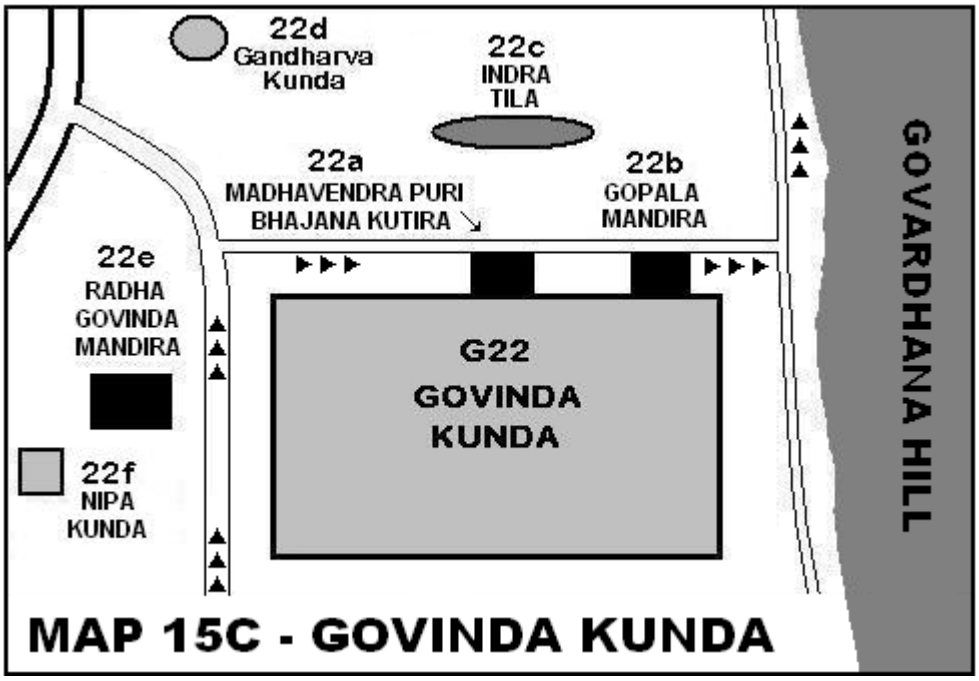
of a cow, when the demigods anointed Krishna as the king of the cows, they were automatically crowning Him as the king of the demigods.

After the demigods had left for their own abode, the cowherd boys arrived there with the cows and were surprised to find all the paraphernalia for *puja* lying there including; a large ornate ceremonial umbrella, golden trays, large golden ghee lamps, fragrant incense, a pure white conch shell, pure white *chamara* whisks and a beautiful peacock fan. The cowherd boys then spontaneously began to worship Krishna with the paraphernalia while they sang songs glorifying Krishna's wonderful activities. From a distance the demigods heard the sweet singing of the cowherd boys, and turning their heads they looked back in amazement at the spontaneous love that the cowherd boys had for Krishna, and felt ashamed at their own efforts to worship the Supreme Lord.

Just as the cowherd boys had finished worshiping Krishna, the cowherd men arrived at Govinda-kunda along with Nanda Maharaja and were surprised to see all the elaborate *puja* paraphernalia. When Nanda enquired from where all the utensils for worship had come from, the cowherd boys replied that after they left Govinda-kunda to round up the cows, when they arrived back all the *puja* paraphernalia had somehow or other appeared there. One boy who witnessed the events, said that he saw a pure white cow arrive with a man who had thousands of eyes all over his body (Indra), and after he paid his obeisance's to Krishna, a large white elephant arrived there (Airavata) and poured water over Krishna, then many others came forward and bathed Krishna. Then a man with four heads (Brahma), and another with five heads (Shiva), began worshiping Krishna with all this paraphernalia and after completing the *puja* they left.

As Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men stood there in amazement, suddenly a tumultuous voice reverberated from the sky saying, "Oh Nanda, just as we the demigods have crowned your son Krishna as the king of the cows and the senses, you should also crown him as the king of Vraja." After hearing the voice from the sky, the cowherd men then worshiped Krishna with the *puja* paraphernalia and crowned him the king of Vrindavana.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15C)



G.22a **Madhavendra Puri Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

When Shrila Madhavandra Puri Goswami came to Vraja, he stayed at this place on the banks of Govinda-kunda and engaged in *bhajana*. He would also regularly perform the

parikrama of Govardhana Hill. He was so renounced that he never begged alms and subsisted on whatever was freely offered to him. One day, while sitting here on the bank of Govinda-kunda engaged in his *bhajana*, a beautiful young cowherd boy came there and offered Madhavendra a pot of cow's milk. Upon seeing the beauty of the little cowherd boy, Madhavandra felt very satisfied within himself and asked the boy from where he came and who had sent the milk. The boy replied that he was from the nearby village of Aniyora, and some of the village ladies while fetching water from the *kunda*, had seen him sitting under a tree, and knowing that he were not eating, asked me to bring this milk to you. The cowherd boy then informed Madhavendra that he had to go as it was time to milk the cows and he would return later to collect the pot.

After the boy left, Madhavendra drank the sweet tasting milk and felt great ecstasy. That night in his dream, Madhavendra saw the very same cowherd boy. In the dream, the cowherd boy took the hand of Madhavendra and led him to a spot next to Govardhana Hill. The boy informed Madhavandra that this place beneath the bushes was his residence, but due to the scorching heat, the pouring rain, the wind, and the cold, he was suffering very much. He then requested that Madhavendra dig him out from beneath the bushes and build him a nice temple for him on top of Govardhana Hill where he could reside. The boy then said his name was Gopala, the lifter of Govardhana Hill, and he had been wondering how long it would be before Madhavendra would come there to rescue him.

On waking early the next morning, Madhavendra realized that the cowherd boy in his dream was non-other than Lord Krishna Himself. Madhavendra immediately went to the spot where in his dream; the cowherd boy had shown the place where He was buried. After calling some of the villagers, they began removing all the bushes and after digging in the earth, they discovered the deity of Lord Gopala. With the help of the villagers Madhavendra took the deity to Yatipura and after performing an elaborate bathing ceremony of the deity, Madhavendra Puri installed Lord Gopala on top of Govardhana Hill, and in due course of time a temple was built, just as Gopala had requested.

How To Get There: This Bhajana Kutira is on the western bank of Govinda-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.22b **Gopala Mandira**

In this temple on the banks of Govinda-kunda next to Madhavendra Puri's *bhajana kutira*, one can see the *pratibhu murti* of Lord Gopala.

How To Get There: This temple is on the western bank of Govinda-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.22c **Indra Tila**

This is the mound on which Indra stood while he performed the *abhisheka* bathing ceremony of Lord Krishna.

How To Get There: This small hill lies 50mt west of Govinda-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.22d **Radha Govinda Mandira**

It is said by local *panditas* that this ancient deity of Govindaji was installed here by Vajranabha Maharaja.

How To Get There: this temple is on the southern bank of Govinda-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.22e **Nipa-kunda**

At this spot on the banks of this Nipa-kunda Krishna and Balarama along with the cowherd boys sometimes took their lunch and would use *nipa* leaves as cups. The word *'nipa'* means a variety of 'palm tree' also known as '*golpata'* that has large leaves.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies 25mt behind the Radha Govinda Mandira (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.22f **Gandharva-kunda**

This *kunda* is said to have been created when the Gandharvas performed their own *abhisheka* ceremony of Krishna. It is said that there were one hundred and eight *kundas* situated around Govardhana Hill where the various demigods performed *abhisheka* of Lord

Krishna. This *kunda* is now dry and practically invisible accept sometimes during the rainy season.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies about 300mt west of Govinda-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15C)

G.23 **Balarama-sthali / Doka Dauji Mandira**

The word *'doka'* is derived from the word *'dekhna'* which means 'to look'. It is said that once Balarama was strolling on Govardhana Hill, when He suddenly saw the *rasa-lila* pastimes at Chandra-sarovara and suddenly became stunned with ecstasy. He simply remained motionless as He observed the exquisite beauty of Radha and Krishna dancing together with the *gopis*. There is also a *mukut-shila* next to the *parikrama* path where one can see the impression of Lord Balarama's crown upon a rock from Govardhana hill.

How To Get There: This place is 20mt from the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.24 **Punchari / Tail-end of Govardhana**

This is the tail-end of Govardhana Hill and is known as Punchari. The word *'punch'* means 'tail' and because Govardhana Hill is described as appearing in the shape of a peacock, Punchari is considered to be the tip of the peacock's long tail. The small village located here on the outer-*parikrama* patha is also known as Punchari Grama.

How To Get There: This place is located on the inner *parikrama* path at the western-most tip of Govardhana Hill (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.25 **Apsara-kunda / Navala-kunda**

This *kunda* was said to have been created when the Apsaras or celestial dancing girls, performed an *abhisheka* of Shri Krishna and then took their bath in the purified water of the

kunda. When Indra performed his *abhisheka* of Krishna at Govinda-kunda, it is said that all the denizens of heaven, including the Apsaras*,* also performed on different occasions their own *abhisheka* of Lord Krishna at various locations around Govardhana Hill. Formerly, there were one hundred and eight different *kundas* of the demigods situated around the sacred Hill, but most have now disappeared.

Right next to Apsara-kunda is Navala-kunda which is also called Punchari-kunda. Navala-Kishore is one of Krishna's names and means 'ever fresh youth'. It is said that once when Radha and Krishna were enjoying their spring-time *rasa-lila* pastimes on the banks of Apsara-kunda, they became so absorbed in the ecstasy of their love for one-another, they simply melted and in Their liquid forms flowed into these two *kundas*, with Radha melting into Apsara-kunda and Krishna melting into Navala-kunda. It is sometimes said that Apsara-kunda was named after Radharani, whose dancing in the *rasa-lila* surpassed that of the Apsaras, the heavenly dancing girls, and for this reason it became known as Apsara-kunda

In the *Vishnu-dharmottara* it says that at one time or another, Krishna manifested all twenty four principle forms of Vishnu here at Apsara-kunda, just for the pleasure of the cowherd boys. Once he manifested the form of twelve-armed Govindadeva and one of the cowherd boys became Garuda, another time Krishna manifested the form of Rama and the cowherd boys became monkeys and bears. On another occasion, Krishna became Varahadeva and started to dig up the earth with His tusks. These various pastime forms of Lord Vishnu were also manifest by Krishna in different places around Vraja.

Some researchers have said that this *kunda* was cleaned and rebuilt by Rani Navala Singh of Bharatapura, and thus the *kunda* became known as Navala-kunda, but this sacred *kunda* existed from the time of Krishna's pastimes in Vraja, therefore the Rani must have performed Dhama-*seva* here because the *kunda* bore her same name.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies 30mt from the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 &15D)

G.25a **Narasingha Mandira**

On a small hill overlooking Apsara-kunda is this temple containing a very ancient deity of Lord Narasingha, which is said to be about one thousand years old. The deity of Lord Narasingha can be seen ripping apart the demon Hiranyakasipu, with the boy saint Prahlada Maharaja standing nearby offering prayers to the Lord. Narasingha is the half-man half-lion incarnation of Lord Vishnu who appeared simply to save the five year old child-devotee Prahlada from the torment of his demonic father Hiranyakashipu.

How To Get There: This temple is about 30mt from Navala-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.25b **Punchari Ka Lotha Baba Mandira**

Situated in the village of Punchari on the outer *parikrama* path is this very popular temple which is said to be dedicated to one of Krishna's very dear friends named Lotha. It is said that when Lotha, who is believed to hail from this village, heard that Krishna and Balarama were leaving for Mathura, he decided to come and sit at this place by the side of the road and wait for Them to return. Local *Vrajavasis* established a temple here and during the course of time, this deity of Lotha Baba started to be worshiped by some people as Hanuman because there is a form of Hanuman known as Luthera-Hanuman.

How To Get There: This temple is on the outer *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.25c **Apsara-bihari Mandira**

In this Radha-Krishna temple on the banks of Apsara-kunda, Radharani is being worshiped as an Apsara. The word *'bihari'* or *'vihari'*, means Krishna the 'enjoyer of the transcendental Apsara', who is non-other than Shrimati Radharani'.

How To Get There: This temple is on the western bank of Apsara-kunda (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.26 **Sutalavana \ Rasa-sthali**

This small forest of *kadamba* and *tamala* trees situated on the northern bank of Apsara-kunda was the site of the spring-time *rasa-lila* pastimes between Radha and Krishna. Formerly there were many *kadamba* and *tamala* trees here and many of them were

entwined together which *Vrajavasis* believe signifies the divine union between Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: This forest is on the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.26a **Sutala-kunda / Sutalavana**

In the forest of Sutalavana there is this small and very isolated *kunda* known as Sutala-kunda. This *kunda* is a favorite haunt of peacocks and is a place where they come to drink water and rest beneath the shade of the trees.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is about 60mt to the right of the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G.27 **Raghava Pandita's Cave / Mani Kundali Gufa**

This is the *gufa* or cave where Shrila Raghava Pandita Goswami performed his *bhajana*. He was a *pandita* or learned scholar but he chose to live the life of a recluse at this deserted spot next to Govardhana Hill. The cave in which he lived is called Mani Kundali Gufa, and Raghava Pandita informed his two companions that is the cave where Radha and Krishna used to sit together and enjoy their pastimes. The cave goes underground for some distance but it has shrunk in size over the years. Some say that Mani Kandali Gufa was another cave further up on Govardhana Hill that has since disappeared. The word *'gufa'* means 'cave' and there used to be many such caves scattered all over Govardhana Hill, where Krishna would enjoy His transcendental pastimes with Radharani and the *gopis*. Raghava Pandita was the devotee who guided Shrinivasa Acharya and Narottama Dasa on their historic *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala, following the same route taken by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu during His own *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala in 1515. According to the *Gaura-gonaddesha-dipika*, Raghava Pandita was one of the *ashta-shakhi gopis* known as Campaklata in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: This cave is about 100mt to the right of the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15 & 15D)

G. 28 **Airavata's Footprint**

It is mentioned in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, that when Indra came to offer his obeisance's to Krishna and beg forgiveness for his dastardly offence of trying to devastate Vrindavana with torrents of rain, Indra's elephant carrier named Airavata, stood at this place to offer his own respects to Krishna and left behind his footprint on one of the rocks from Govardhana Hill.

How To Get There: This footprint is about 10mt to the right of the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.29 **Indra Puja**

This is place where the king of heaven Indra, came before Krishna to offer his humble obeisance's and beg forgiveness for his offence in daring to challenge the Supreme Lord's authority and for attempting to punish the *Vrajavasis* for not worshiping him. It is said that Krishna was walking on Govardhana Hill when Indra arrived there with Surabhi Devi, the mother-goddess of cows, and his elephant carrier Airavata, having just walked all the way from Raheja, barefoot, as a penance. Surabhi Devi spoke first and requested Krishna to forgive Indra his offences and while doing so it is said that she bathed the lotus feet of the Lord with milk. After Krishna agreed to Surabhi Devi's request, Indra stepped forward and threw himself on the ground before the Lord and offered his heart-felt prayers while at the same time shedding a torrent of tears.

Some say that Indra performed a *puja* to Krishna at this place and made various other offerings including fifty-six different types of food preparations known as *capana-bhoga*. The followers of the Vallabhacharya *sampradaya* believe this is the spot where Indra stood when he performed his *abhisheka* of Krishna, but there is no *shastric* evidence to substantiate this claim. It is very well documented that the place where Indra performed *abhisheka* was at Govinda-kunda.

How To Get There: This place is 20mt to the right of the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.29a **Indra-kunda**

This *kunda* was created from the torrent of tears shed by Lord Indra when he came to offer his humble obeisance's and beg forgiveness from Lord Krishna. Indra had mistakenly tried to destroy Vrindavana with a great deluge of water by sending the *samvartaka* rain-clouds of devastation, and in a repentant mood, he shed so many tears that a small *kunda* was formed. This *kunda* has almost disappeared and is very hard to find as it is always dry accept sometimes in the rainy season.

How To Get There: This *kund* lies about 30mt on the left of the inner *parikrama* path. (see map no. xx)

G.30 **Kadambavana / Kadamba-khandi**

Next to Indra Puja is Kadambavana which is also called Kadamba-khandi, where Radha and Krishna enjoyed many pastimes amongst the sweet smelling *kadamba* trees. The word *'khandi'* means a 'forest grove' where a particular type of tree grows. It is said in the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, that Krishna would sometimes wait here on the path used by Radha and Her girlfriends whenever they passed through this forest. In Kadambavana one can also see Surabhi-kunda, Airavata-kunda, Hariju-kunda, and Rudan-Kunda.

How To Get There: This forest is on the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.30a **Surabhi-kunda**

It is said that the mother-goddess of all cows Surabhi Devi, arrived at Govardhana Hill along with Indra and offered her own prayers of glorification to Lord Krishna, humbly requesting Him to forgive Indra for his great offence in attempting to devastate Vrindavana. Lord Brahma had asked Surabhi Devi to help Indra obtain forgiveness from Krishna for his sins, as he knew Krishna would fulfill any request made by Surabhi, because He is Govinda, the well-wisher of the cows. It is also said that because this area of Govardhana Hill peaceful and also very beautiful, Surabhi Devi decided to stay here near the sacred Hill and therefore made this place her residence. It is believed that Vajranabha Maharaja established this *kunda*.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is hard to find and lies about 40mt from the inner *parikrama* path (see map no.15)

G.30b **Airavata-kunda**

This *kunda* was created by Lord Indra's elephant carrier Airavata, when he stored water in this *kunda* from the celestial River Ganges which is known as the Mandakini River. The water was later used for the bathing ceremony of Lord Krishna that was performed by the heavenly king Indra at Govinda-kunda.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is hard to find and lies 50mt from the inner *parikrama* path and 250mt north of Surabhi-kunda (see map no. 15)

G.30c **Rudan-kunda / Hariju-kunda**

It is said that Rudan-kunda was created from the tears of Lord Shiva. The word *'rudan'* means to 'shed tears' or to 'weep' and this is where Lord Shiva shed a torrent of tears due to feelings of ecstatic love while sitting here absorbed in meditation on the pastimes of Radha and Krishna. It is also said that once Radharani and Her girlfriends were sitting here and due to very intense feelings of being separated from Krishna, they began shedding so many tears that filled a lake. Surrounding Rudan-kunda is another large *kunda* known as Hariju-kunda, which is said to be named after one of Krishna's cowherd boyfriends

How To Get There: This *kunda* is on the right of the outer *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.31 **Yatipura (Jetipura)**

The village of Yatipura was named after Yati Maharaja, the name used by the *Vrajavasis* to address Madhavendra Puri Goswami. The word *'yati'* means a *'sadhu',* a '*sannyasi'* or a 'traveling mendicant'. When Lord Gopala Raya was installed by Madhavendra Puri Goswami in the temple on the top of Govardhana Hill, it is said that the *annakuta* and *abhisheka* ceremony of the deity and were performed here at Yatipura. After this event, the village gained importance and became the residential quarters of the priests who served the

deity. One day, the temple priests who hailed from Bengal, ran away in fear of being killed by rampaging Mohammedan soldiers, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami immediately appointed Vitthalanatha Bhatta, Vallabha Bhatta's son as the head *pujari*. Vitthalanatha, who was very devoted to Lord Chaitanya, was a close associate and follower of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. Vitthalanatha made his residence at Yatipura and his father Vallabha established his *baithaka* or sitting place here.

Vitthalanatha spent the rest of his life in the service of Lord Gopala and his *samadhi* is located at the place where the *abhisheka* and *annakuta* ceremony of Lord Gopala was held. There is a Govardhana-*shila* here which is now being worshiped as the Mukharavinda by the Vallabhacharya *sampradaya*. In the village one can see the famous *dandavata-shila* that is worshiped by the local priests to free themselves from any offences they might commit while walking on Govardhana Hill to serve in the Gopala temple. It is said that anyone who circumambulates this *shila* seven times while offering his *dandavata pranama*, is also freed from any offences inadvertently committed while serving the deity or performing Govardhana *parikrama*.

How To Get There: This village lies on the inner *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.32 Vilachu-kunda / Vilachuvana

The forest of Vilachuvana has now disappeared but the beautiful Vilachu-kunda can still be seen. It is said that during the attack on Vrindavana by the Mughal tyrant Emperor Aurangzeb, the deity of Lord Harideva was hidden in this *kunda* for some time before being moved to Barauli.

This very beautiful and secluded *kunda* within the forest of Vilachuvana, was a favorite sitting place of Radha and Krishna, where They would spend hours just sitting and talking to one-another. There is also an old stone bench which is now broken where it is said the 'divine lovers' used to sit. On one occasion, Radharani lost Her ankle-bell here and began searching for it. When Krishna arrived, He jokingly asked Radha if she was looking for His flute that had been lost. Radha told Krishna to stop joking and help look for the lost ankle-bell (*nupur*). When Krishna persisted in making jokes, Radha became angry and refused to talk with Him. In order to pacify Radharani, Krishna got down on His knees and started to franticly dig up the earth with His bare hands while searching for the ankle-bell. To Radharani's utter amazement, Krishna began digging up all kinds of ankle-bells, some of them were made of silver, and some of them were of gold, Krishna also dug up a few precious gems as well. Placing all the ankle-bells before Radharani and with a beautiful smile on His face, Krishna asked Radharani which of the ankle-bells was Hers. Feeling great happiness at Krishna's endeavor to please Her, Radharani immediately embraced Krishna and They both sat down on the bench to enjoy Their intimate love-talks. Due to these pastimes between Radha and Krishna, this forest is also called Vilasavana, which means the 'forest of ambrosial pastimes'.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies about 500mt north of the *parikrama* path across agricultural fields. It is very difficult to reach as there is no direct path (see map no. 15)

G.33 Sakhisthali (Sakhivana)

This is the village associated with of the *gopi* named Chandravali, who is the cousin of Radharani and also Her main rival in achieving Krishna's love and affection. It is said that of all the *gopis*, two are most prominent, they are Radharani and Chandravali, but of the two, Radha is the best and most expert in pleasing Krishna. Some say that Chandravali was born here and also lived here with her sixty four *sakhis* or close friends. There are others who say that Chandravali only lived here and was actually born at Rithore near Sanket. Unfortunately the forest of Sahhivana, which the *Puranas* say is one of the famous *upavana* or sub-forest, has almost disappeared, but the lake known as Sakhisthali-kund can still be seen and is visible from the Govardhana *parikrama* path.

How To Get There: This place is 1.5km on the left of the *parikrama* path directly opposite to Manasi-ganga (see map no. 15)

G.34 **Uddhava-kunda / Puspavana**

This *kunda* in Pushpavana forest is said to have been originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja and lies just behind Kusuma-sarovara. The *kunda* is dedicated to Krishna's most dear friend Uddhava, who eternally resides here in Pushpavana in the form of grass known as *gulma-lata*. Uddhava's sitting place (*baithaka*) is nearby on the banks of Kusuma-sarovara.

How To Get There: This *kund* is on the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.35 **Shiva Khora (Shiva Pushkarini)**

There is a shrine on the banks of this *kunda* dedicated to Lord Shiva known as Rameshwara Mahadeva, who is the *ksetra-pala* who protects the northern part of Radha-kunda. The word *'khora'* means a holy place and *'pushkarini'* means a lake. The word *'shiva'* can also mean a 'jackal'. According to the *Padma Purana*, some local children had trapped a female jackal in a hole near this *kunda* and out of fear the jackal started to wail piteously. Hearing the crying of the jackal, Radharani sent Her girlfriends to save the jackal saying that at Radha-kunda, no creature should suffer in any way. The *sakhis* returned with the frightened female jackal and Radharani gave blessings to the jackal that she would become one of Radha's maidservants in her future life.

How To Get There: This *kund* is on the right of the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.36 **Malyahari-kunda**

This is the *kunda* where the famous pearl pastime took place that has been described in Raghunatha Dasa Goswami's book *Mukta-charita*. One day, Krishna came to this *kunda* and saw that the *gopis* were making garlands and necklaces from very fine and beautiful pearls, and He asked the *gopis* for a few so that he could decorate His favorite cows. Unfortunately, the *gopis* refused to give any of their pearls, and so in an angry mood, Krishna ran off to find mother Yashoda. Krishna requested mother Yashoda to give Him some pearls so He could plant them in His garden and grow pearls that would be far superior to the pearls of the *gopis*. Mother Yashoda smiled and informed Krishna that pearls do not grow in gardens, but come from the sea. Ignoring His mother's words, Krishna took the few pearls that His mother gave Him and left to plant them in His garden. Every day Krishna went to the garden and watered the pearls with cow's milk provided by mother Yashoda. Within a short time a few green shoots started sprouting from the ground and Krishna joyfully informed the *gopis* about the shoots appearing in His pearl garden. On hearing Krishna's words, the *gopis* simply laughed, saying that the shoots were not pearls but only thorn bushes.

Within no time the shoots soon turned into creepers covered with fabulous multi-colored pearls that shone as brightly as the moon. Krishna then ran to inform the *gopis* about His fabulous pearls, saying that they were far superior to the dull looking pearls of the *gopis*. When the *gopis* saw Krishna's pearls, they were overwhelmed by the exquisite beauty of the pearls and requested Krishna to give some of His pearls to them, but He flatly refused. The *gopis* then decided that they would plant their own pearl garden, and after collecting all the pearls from their parent's houses, they planted them in a garden. Three times a day the *gopis* watered their pearl garden with milk, ghee, yogurt, and butter, thinking that this would produce even better pearls than what Krishna had grown in his garden.

When green shoots appeared in their pearl garden the *gopis* were very happy, but that happiness was short-lived and soon changed to sadness, when only large thorn bushes grew from the shoots. Krishna arrived there with His cowherd boyfriends and started laughing at the *gopis* very costly thorn bushes. Then in front of the *gopis*, Krishna then began distributing His wonderful pearls amongst His cowherd boyfriends, who then began decorating their cows, buffaloes, and even their goats, with garlands of beautiful pearls. Even the monkeys in the trees were given a share of the fabulous pearls, but the *gopis* were not given even one. Because the *gopis* had taken all the pearls from their homes, they were now in trouble with their elders due to having lost everything in their failed pearl garden.

The *gopis* tried everything to get some pearls from Krishna and even agreed to pay, but after haggling for some time over the price, Krishna ultimately refused to sell the pearls.

Krishna then secretly began making pearl necklaces for each of the *gopis*, selecting the very best for Radharani. Krishna then put Radha's pearl necklace into a golden box and after engraving Her name on the top of the box, sent one of His boyfriends to deliver the fabulous pearl necklaces to Radharani and all the other *gopis*, who were overjoyed to receive such a gift of exquisite pearls. They in turn sent many gifts to Krishna out of happiness. When the *gopis* returned to their homes wearing the high quality and opulent pearl necklaces, their elders became very happy to see their good fortune.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is situated 200mt to the left of the *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.37 **Radha Kunja-bihari Mandira**

This temple was established in 1935, by the illustrious founder of the Gaudiya Math, Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami. Just next to the temple is the *pushpa samadhi* of the great Vaishnava saint Gaura-Kisore Dasa Babaji, who was the initiating spiritual master of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami. Gaura-Kishore Dasa Babaji was a very close and intimate friend as well as *shiksha* disciple of Shrila Bhaktivinode Thakura, the father of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami, who was himself the spiritual master of the Iskcon founder-*acharya* His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

How To Get There: This temple is on the main *parikrama* path (see map no. 15)

G.38 **Radha-kunda / Shyama-kunda**

Returning to Radha-kunda marks the end of the Govardhana *parikrama.*

END OF GOVARDHANA PARIKRAMA

While rejoining the Vraja Mandala Parikrama route, just before leaving Govardhana Town on the way to Parasauli, one may visit two important places of interest just south of Dana Ghati; namely Papa-mochana / Rina-mochana-kundas and Indra-dhwaja-vedi.

G.39 **Papa-mochana-kunda / Rina-mochana-kunda**

These two very ancient *kundas* have been gradually encroached upon and built over, which bears testimony to the influence of Kali-*yuga* and disregard for places of religious importance even in the holy Dhama. Rin-mochana-kund disappeared in the early seventies when offices were built on top of it and Papa-mochana-kund began to be encroached in the early nineties by private housing development. It has been mentioned in the *Puranas* that anyone who bathed in those *kundas* would be freed from the sin of killing a *brahmana* or a cow.

How To Get There: This place is located at the Parasauli road junction (see map no. 15)

G.40 **Indra-dhwaja-vedi**

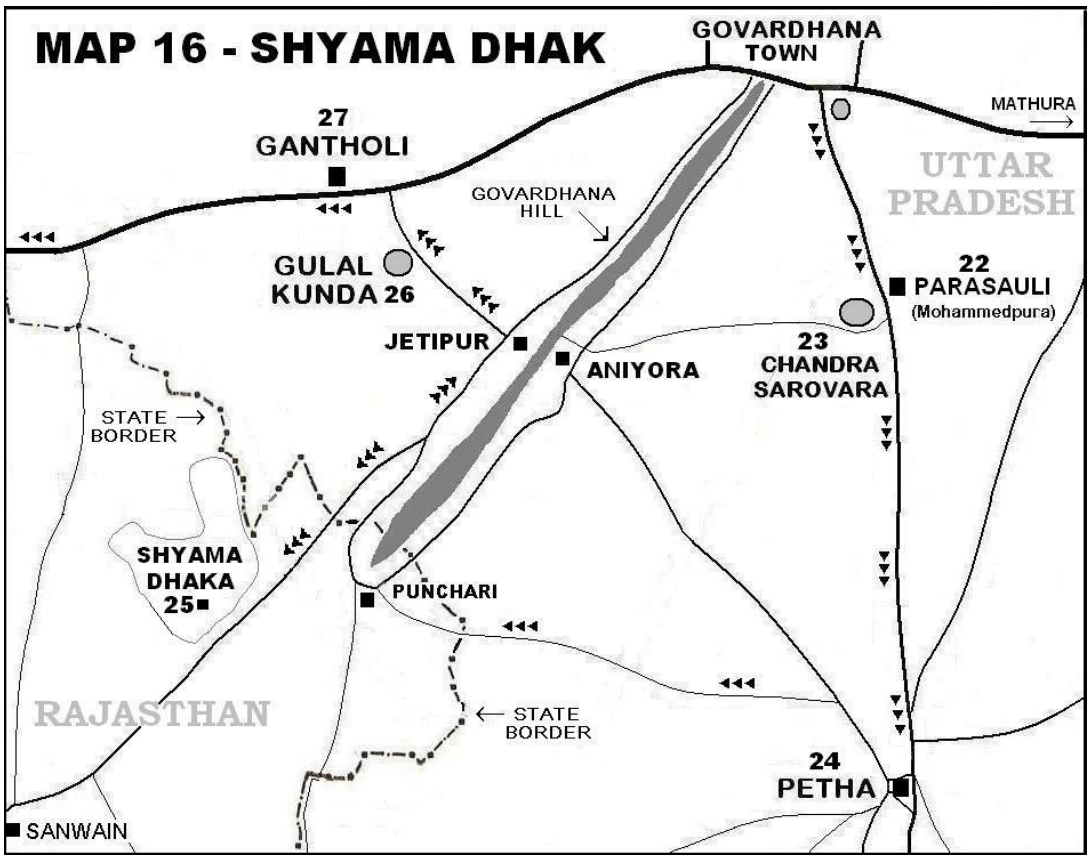
This is the spot where Krishna's father Nanda Maharaja and the *Vrajavasis* used to worship Lord Indra, the king of heaven. When the *Vrajavasis* cancelled their yearly *'Indra-puja'* on the advice of Krishna, they instead performed Govardhana-*puja* causing Lord Indra to become very angry and as a reprisal he attempted to inundate Vrindavana with devastating rainfall.

How To Get There: This place is situated on Mathura road near the Govardhana Bus Stand (see map no. 15)

BM.22 **PARASAULI (Mohammadpur)**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "O Srinivasa, behold this village of Parasauli! Here Shri Krishnachandra danced the *rasa* in spring. Look at the peerless Chandra-sarovara! Here Krishna rested after dancing the *rasa*. This village is where Radha and Krishna performed their wonderful *rasa-lila* pastimes in springtime and also where the greatly celebrated lake known as Chandra-sarovara is situated. The ancient name of this place was Parasauli, but during the Mughal rule it was changed to Mohammadpur."**

The *Puranas* say the Parasauli is one of the famous *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vraja. It is also said that a former channel of the river Yamuna, which passed through the villages of Pali Brahmanan and Yamuna Mata, also flowed in this direction and ran through the village of Parasauli. On the banks of that same river, Radha and Krishna performed the *Vasanta*



rasa-lila pastimes which occurred on the occasion of the *Vasanta-purnima*, or the full-moon night in spring. The pastimes of *rasa-lila* were performed in many places around Vraja during the different seasons of the year. The famous *rasa-lila* performed in Vrindavana was enacted on the occasion of the *Sarat-purnima*, or the full-moon night during mid-summer.

The *rasa-lila* performed at Parasauli was enacted by Shri Krishna for the special satisfaction of Shrimati Radharani and all the eternally liberated *nitya-siddha gopis,* who descended along with Radha and Krishna in order to take part in Their transcendental pastimes on earth. Included amongst the eternally liberated *gopis* are the *ashta-shakhis*, or the eight principle girlfriends of Radharani, along with the various groups of their friends and assistants. Also included amongst these *nitya-siddha gopis* is Chandravali and her various groups of friends and assistants. It is said that during the *rasa-lila* in Vrindavana, the *nitya-siddha gopis* were unable to exhibit their innermost feelings of love for Krishna, due to the presence of so many new *gopis* These new *gopis* were either *sadhana-siddha* or *kripa-siddha gopis* that were entering Krishna's pastimes for the first time. Included amongst these new *gopis* were the sages of Dandakaranya forest, who had received blessings from Lord Ramachandra that they would be born in their next life as *gopis* in Vrindavana, and the Apsaras or heavenly dancing girls, who attempted to seduce Nara-Narayana Rishi and after having failed, received the benediction that they would be born as *gopis* in their next lives and would be able to take part in Krishna's conjugal pastimes in Vrindavana.

Having understood the inner feelings of the *nitya-siddha gopis* headed by Radharani and Chandravali, Krishna enacted the *rasa-lila* at Parasauli so that these *gopis* could, without feeling any constraint or inhibition, fully manifest their most wanton feelings of amorous love in the full-bloom of *parakiya-bhava* The *rasa-lila* at Parasauli is said to have lasted for a night of Brahma, and while witnessing the ecstatic dancing of Krishna and the *gopis*, the moon became momentarily stunned and remained stationary in the night sky.

How To Get There: This village is 2km south of Govardhana Town on the road to Sonk (see map no. 16)

BM.23 **CHANDRA-SAROVARA**

After having spent the whole night engaged in *rasa*-dancing with the *gopis*, Krishna, while still wearing His special *rasa-lila* dress, came here to rest on the banks of Chandra-sarovara The *gopis* also came there and began massaging Krishna's limbs and also fanned Him in order to relieve His fatigue. It is said that as Radha-kunda is very dear to Radharani, so Chandra-sarovara is very dear to Chandravali, the *gopi* considered second only to Radharani in attracting Krishna's love. This lake is also very dear to the moon-god Chandra, because at this place, due to experiencing transcendental ecstasy, he became momentarily stunned and ceased all external movement when he witnessed the *rasa*-dance between Radha and Krishna. This lake is famous all over Vraja because of the spring-time *rasa-lila* that took place near its shores. Even Lord Balarama became stunned when He also witnessed the extraordinary *rasa-lila* at Chandra-sarovara, while He stood on top of Govardhana Hill. The place from where Lord Balarama saw the *rasa-lila* became celebrated as Doka Dauji. The word *'doka'* is a corrupted form of *'dekna'* or 'to look'.

Chandra-sarovara is the site of many other wonderful pastimes where Krishna and the *gopis* would regularly meet and engage in singing, dancing, playing sports, and drinking honey. The honey drinking pastimes known as *madhupan-lila* were very popular, not only with Krishna and Balarama, but with the *gopis* and the cowherd boys as well. The word *'madhu'* means 'honey' and '*pan*' means to 'drink'. On the banks of this lake, Krishna often engaged in decorating Radharani by applying mascara and other cosmetics on Radha's moonlike face, and decorating Her transcendental limbs with gem-encrusted ornaments and golden jewelry. Krishna would also comb Radha's long black hair into braids and then decorate Her braids with sweet smelling forest flowers. There is a shrine here on the banks at Chandra-sarovara known as the Shringara Mandira that commemorates this particular pastime. The word *'shringara'* means 'dressing' or 'decorating'.

Surrounding this lake are a number of other shrines including the *bhajana kutir* and *samadhi* of the blind Vaishnava saint named Sura Dasa, who wrote two well known poetry books; *Sura-sagar* and *Sura-padavali*. There is also the *baithaka* or sitting place of Vallabha Bhatta and his son Vitthalanath. Raghunatha Dasa Goswami appointed Vitthalanatha as the head priest of Madhavendra Puri's famous deity named Gopala that was later moved to Nathadwara in Rajasthan, and became well-known as Shri Nathaji. Shriman Vallabha Bhatta met Lord Chaitanya a number of times at Puri and Prayag where he had once lived, he later moved to Mathura with his sons and eventually founded the Vallabhacharya *sampradaya*.

How To Get There: This place is next to Parasauli Village (see map no. 16)

BM.24 **PAITHA (Petha)**

This village achieved its name after the celebrated pastime of Krishna's hiding from the *gopis* near this village. The places of interest here include; the Chaturbhuja-Narayana Mandir, Narayana-sarovara, Lakshmi Kupa (well), the Aintha Kadamba, Ksira Sagara, and Balabhadra-kunda.

The word *'paitha'* means 'went into' and refers to Krishna's two extra arms that were manifested when He exhibited His Chaturbhuja-Narayana form before the *gopis*, and were then withdrawn or 'went into' His body when He saw Radha's intense love for Him. Once during the *rasa-lila* at Parasauli, which is not very far from here, Krishna wanted to witness for Himself the pure and unadulterated love of Radha, and the intensity of Her mood of separation from Him. Therefore, He suddenly disappeared from the arena of the *rasa-lila* and assuming the four-armed form of Lord Vishnu, hid Himself in a nearby forest grove.

In great anxiety Radharani and the *gopis* started to search for Krishna everywhere. Arriving at the forest grove where Krishna was hiding, the *gopis* saw the four-armed form of Lord Vishnu, and after paying their obeisances, they moved on in search of Krishna. However, when Radharani came there in search of Him, Krishna could not bear to see Radharani's distraught and pitiable condition while being separated from Him, Krishna was so moved by Radharani's *maha-bhava,* He was unable to maintain His four-armed feature any longer, and two arms suddenly disappeared. Krishna immediately came forward to surrender Himself before His beloved Radha in order to mitigate Her intense feelings of sorrow. According to the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy, this important pastime establishes the supremacy of Radharani over all other *gopis* including Chandravali, Her main rival in attracting Krishna's love. This is because Radharani alone exhibits *mahabhava*, and no other *gopi* possesses this supreme transcendental attribute of divine love. Due to this special quality, Radha is able to bring even Krishna under Her control, which is due to Her unparalleled love and complete devotion towards Him.

It has been mentioned in some scriptures including *Gopala-champu*, that during Krishna's pastime of lifting Govardhana Hill, He came to Paitha where there was a very deep cavern that ran straight below Govardhana Hill. Krishna entered *(paitha)* this cavern so that He could get underneath Govardhana Hill and easily lift it up on His little finger. Even in recent memory, locals say that there were many such deep caverns all over Govardhana Hill, but in course of time, most of these caverns have either collapsed and disappeared altogether, or have been closed by the authorities because of the danger they posed. There are many stories of local people entering these deep caves, which in some cases ran for miles underground, never to be seen again. It is also said that once Krishna had lifted Govardhana Hill, the *Vrajavasis* also entered under the Hill from this place. The word *'paitha'* also means 'entered'. It has been described that the *Vrajavasis* took shelter within a large cavernous arena below the mountain once it had been lifted by Krishna.

Before lifting Govardhana Hill, the cowherd boys, who had all assembled at Paitha, were trying to convince Krishna not to attempt such a 'Herculean' feat because His body was so soft and delicate. Therefore, in order to test Krishna's strength and also convince themselves, the cowherd boys asked Him to twist the trunk a nearby *kadamba* tree, which He easily accomplished with great ease. Feeling satisfied the cowherd boys agreed to let Krishna lift Govardhana Hill and dressed Him up in a wrestler's costume, complete with a beautiful sash around His waist. The *kadamba* tree at Paitha that Krishna twisted became known as the Aintha Kadamba (twisted *kadamba*). Unfortunately this particular *kadamba* tree disappeared some years ago.

How To Get There: This village is 3km east of Parasauli on the road that goes to Sonk (see map no. 16)

BM.25 **SHYAMA DHAKA (Shyamadhak)**

This small and secluded forest of ancient *palasa* trees is famous as one of the sites where Krishna and the *gopis* performed the pastime of *'rasa-lila'*. The name Shyama Dhaka means the holy place (*dhaka*) where the trees are imbued with a bluish-black hue (*shyama*). When Krishna and the cowherd boys were playing here, they would use the leaves of *kadamba* trees as cups during their forest picnics. The places of interest here include; Rasa-sthali where the *rasa-lila* took place, Gopatala-kunda where the cowherd boys would sit to take their lunch, Gopa Sagara where the cowherd boys used to swim and Vitthalanatha's Baithaka or sitting place. Vitthalanatha was the head *pujari* of Madhavendra Puri's Gopala deity.

How To Get There: This place is 1.5km from Punchari village (see map no. 16)

BM.26 **GULALA-KUNDA**

The word *'gulala'* refers to the powdery 'bright red pigment' used in religious ceremonies all over India. Once, on the occasion of the annual *Holi* festival, after having thrown red colored *gulala* powder on each other, Radha and Krishna came to this *kunda* near Ganthuli village to bathe. After they had bathed and sported in the *kunda* for some time,

the water of the *kunda* turned *'gulali'* or a reddish color, due to the red *gulala* powder that had been thrown on the 'divine lovers' during the *holi* festivities.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 1km from Jetipur on the road that goes to Gantoli village (see map no. 16)

BM.27 **GANTHULI (Gantholi)**

The name of this village has been derived from the word *'gantha'* which means 'knot' and refers to this being the place where the 'knot' was tied. One day, Radha and Krishna accompanied by the *gopis*, came here to play *holi*, by throwing red colored powder (*gulala*) on each other. During the course of the festivities, Radha and Krishna sat down together on a nicely decorated throne prepared by the *gopis*. While Radha and Krishna were engaged in talking together, Lalita-sakhi, Radha's close friend, sneaked up behind the throne and secretly tied the corner of Radha's *saree* to Krishna's *dhoti*. This tying together of a girl's *saree* and a boy's *dhoti* is always done at the time of a marriage ceremony, signifying the union of oneness between husband and wife. When the *holi* festivities came to an end and time came for Radha and Krishna to take their bath at Gulala-kunda, when they stood up, to their surprise they found that their clothes were tied together. At that moment, all the *gopis* suddenly started laughing and clapping their hands in great happiness at seeing the 'Divine Couple' tied together, as if they had just been married.

How To Get There: The village of Gantholi is situated 300mt from Gulala-kunda and 1.5km north of Jetipur, and 3km west Govardhana Town (see map no. 16)

Lord Chaitanya Visits Ganthuli Grama

While on His *parikrama* around Vraja Mandala, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu arrived at Govardhana Hill, but refused to climb the sacred hill to visit the Gopala Temple situated on top of the hill. This was because according to Lord Chaitanya's spiritual vision, Govardhana Hill was non-different from Lord Krishna Himself, and therefore He refused to place His feet on the hill. Even though the Vedic scriptures confirm that Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was an incarnation of Lord Krishna, He appeared in the form of an ordinary human being and behaved just like any other humble Vaishnava devotee of Lord Krishna. During His life-time, Lord Chaitanya strictly observed all the rules and regulations of *sadhana-bhakti* and set the highest standards of devotional service for all future generations of devotees to follow. Even to this day, the followers of Lord Chaitanya who are known as Gaudiya Vaishnavas do not step on Govardhana Hill remembering Lord Chaitanya's own example.

While performing *parikrama* of Govardhana Hill, Lord Chaitanya had *darshana* of Lord Harideva where He danced in ecstasy for hours. After leaving the temple of Harideva, He began to think about Lord Gopala, the deity found by Shrila Madhavendra Puri, the celebrated guru of His own guru Shrila Ishvara Puri. Lord Chaitanya began lamenting that because the temple of Lord Gopala was on top of Govardhana Hill, He would never be able to have *darshana* of the deity, because He had decided not to set His foot on the sacred hill. The next day, continuing with His *parikrama,* Lord Chaitanya arrived at Govinda-kunda where He took His bath. At that moment, news arrived that the deity of Lord Gopala had been moved to the village of Ganthuli Grama for safety, due to a rumor of an imminent attack by a rampaging horde of Mohammedan Turk soldiers out on a looting spree. Upon hearing this incredible news, Lord Chaitanya felt great ecstasy and immediately left for Ganthuli Grama to have *darshana* of Lord Gopala. After arriving at Ganthuli and seeing the extra-ordinary beauty of Lord Gopala, Lord Chaitanya entered into a state of transcendental bliss and while incessantly chanting the holy names of the Lord, He began dancing in great ecstasy. The deity of Lord Gopala remained at Ganthuli Grama for three days and Lord Chaitanya also remained there, totally immersed in the mood of ecstatic love.

According to the *Chaitanya-charitamrta*, the threat of an attack by Turks was a transcendental trick performed by Lord Gopala, as a pretext for giving *darshana* to Lord Chaitanya at Ganthuli. It has also been said by others, that Lord Gopala actually desired to have *darshana* of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the incarnation of divine love and the embodiment of 'Radha-*bhava'.* This celebrated deity of Shrila Madhavendra Puri was very famous for His many extra-ordinary pastimes and there are innumerable stories where the

deity interacted directly with His devotees. A few years after giving *darshana* to Lord Chaitanya, Lord Gopala made a similar arrangement when He gave *darshana* to Lord Chaitanya's most senior disciples, Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis at Mathura, where the deity had been taken for safety on the pretext of another imminent attack. When all the deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis were moved to Rajasthan for safety during the despotic rule of the tyrant Aurangzeb, the deity of Lord Gopala was moved to Nathadwara under the patronage of the king of Udaipura. The deity is still residing there even today and is presently known as Lord Shri Nathaji.

The tradition amongst Gaudiya Vaishnavas of not setting foot on Govardhana Hill has been adhered to by all Gaudiya *acharyas* including the Six Goswamis. It was only on the direct order of Lord Gopala that Shrila Madhavandra Puri stepped on the sacred hill, because Lord Gopala wanted to be installed on the top of Govardhana Hill and asked Madhavendra to install Him there and also build a temple. This means that the *pujaris* serving the deity had to climb Govardhana Hill every day to perform the *seva-puja*. Therefore, a large Govardhana-*shila* was installed at the base of the sacred hill at Yatipura known as the *dandavata-shila*, and the *pujaris* would circumambulate this *shila* seven times while paying *dandavata-pranams*, and this was equal to performing *dandavata-parikrama* around the entire Govardhana Hill, and by this they would free themselves from any *aparadha*.

BM.28 **RAHEJA (Bahaj)**

The name Raheja is derived from the word *'behaya'* which means 'remorse' and also 'shame'. According to *Bhakti-ratnakara*, Lord Indra, after realizing how offensive his behavior had been towards the lotus feet of Lord Krishna, and feeling full of remorse, came to this place accompanied by Surabhi Devi. Lord Indra thoroughly condemned himself for daring to challenge the authority of Lord Shri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Indra had impudently attempted to devastate the land of Vrindavana by sending torrents of rain which caused flooding and great hardship to all the *Vrajavasis*. It was Lord Brahma who advised Indra to take help from the Surabhi Devi, the mother-goddess of all cows, by asking her to speak to Krishna on Indra's behalf. This was because Brahma knew that Krishna, as the well-wisher of the cows, would naturally fulfill any request made by mother Surabhi.

It is said that Lord Indra dismounted from his elephant carrier at Raheja, and as a sign of great remorse, walked barefoot all the way to Govardhana Hill. Surabhi Devi then approached Lord Krishna with Indra's humble request for forgiveness. Lord Krishna agreed to Surabhi's request and Indra immediately came forward and while shedding an ocean of tears, fell down just like a stick before the lotus feet of Lord Krishna. The place where Indra bowed down while asking for forgiveness became celebrated as Indra Puja, and the torrent of tears shed by Indra formed a small lake which became known as Indra-kunda.

How To Get There: Bahaj is 6km west of Gantholi on the road from Govardhana to Dig (see map no. BM 84)

BM.29 **DIRGHAPURA (Dig)**

Dirghapura gains mention in the *Skanda Purana* and after leaving Shakatikara (Chhatikara), it is believed that Nanda Maharaja stayed at Dirghapura for some period of time, before moving to Kamyavana and then finally to Nandagrama, where he built his permanent residence. Sanskrit scholars have say that the name of this place is derived from the word *'diga'* or '*dirgha*' which means 'to slacken' or 'to loosen', and refers to Shri Krishna, who could slacken the strict moral principles kept by Radharani, simply by His charm, His incredible beauty, and by the sound of His transcendental flute. Some historians have said that in the Treta-*yuga*, when Lord Rama's brother Shatrughna established His kingdom at Mathura, His brother Lakshmana established his kingdom here at Dighapura. There is a very ancient temple in the town dedicated to Lakshmana who was the family deity of the Jat kings. Historians also say that Rama's other brother Bharata established His kingdom at nearby Bharatapura.

In more recent history, Dig was the capital of the great Jat kingdom founded in 1722 and was at one time ruled over by the famous Jat king, Suraj Mal. This kingdom encompassed the same area as the ancient kingdom of Matsya which is now forms part of the modern-day

Bharatpur District. During the British rule, the great fort at Dig became a bastion and stronghold of the Jats, and was the scene of many a fierce battle. Dig Fort could not be captured by the British due to its strength and impregnability, which withstood the fire-power of a large battery of British cannons.

There is a story that a former king of Dig was most unhappy because the Vraja Mandala Parikrama did not visit his city, but instead took another route to Adi-Badrinatha via Devashirsa, Munishirsa, and Paramadana. Therefore the king pleaded that as Dig fell within Vraja Mandala, the *parikrama* should also visit his town. The king jokingly said that if the devotees performing *parikrama* did not come to Dig voluntarily, he would send the local police-force with canes (*lathis*) and forcibly bring the *parikrama* devotees to Dig. Due to seeing the great desire of the king to host the devotees and have the Vraja Mandala P*arikrama* visit Dig, the *parikrama* route was then changed and the devotees started coming to Dig and spending the night at the hospitality of the king. From that time on, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama began to visit Dig. It is said that to please the king, one devotee jokingly gave Dig the name of Lathavana, or the 'forest of canes'.

Dig, sometimes pronounced as Deeg, has become a popular destination with foreign tourists who visit the famous Dig Fort and the exquisite Monsoon Palace (also known as Gopala Bhavan), and its unique water gardens containing over five hundred fountains. There is also a large lake at Dig which is known as Rupasagar where the Jal Mahal palace is also located.

How To Get There: Dig is 14km west of Govardhana Town and 3km west of Bahaj (see map no. BM 84)

BM.30 **DIDAVALI**

This is said to be the village where Krishna's paternal grandmother lived. Her name was Variyasi Devi, and she was the wife of Parjanya Maharaja, the father of Nanda Maharaja. The word *'didima'* means 'grandmother' and the name of the village is derived from the word *'didavali'*, or the 'grandmothers place'. In the village one can see Didavali-kunda, and a temple dedicated to Lord Narasinghadeva.

How To Get To There: This village is 5km north of Dig on the Kaman road (see map no. BM 84)

BM.31 **KHONHA (Khoh)**

At this place it is said that Radha and Her girlfriends used to play one of their favorite games called *'kho'*. When Radharani saw the *sakhis* and *manjaris* playing the game of *kho*, which is a game especially for girls, it gave Her great pleasure. The village of Khoh derives its name from the *gopi's* pastime of playing the game of *kho*.

How To Get There: This place is 3km west of Didavali on the road to Adi-badri (see map no. BM 84)

BM.32 **SHANARA SHIKHARA (Kadamba Khandi)**

At Shanara Shikhara there is a *kadamba* forest nearby that is sometimes called Kadamba Khandi as well as Kadamba-kanana. This is where Radha and Krishna enjoyed many of Their wonderful pastimes during the month of *Sravana*, such as the swing pastimes known as *jhulana-lila*. This place is surrounded by mountains including the Nila Parvata and the Dhavala Parvata, which is also called the 'White Mountain' because of its color. The word '*dhavala'* refers to 'white' or an 'off-white' color. Another name for this mountain is Navanita Parvata, because it appears to be the color of butter (*navanita)*. From Shanara Shikhara the *parikrama* path goes overland to Adi-Badrinatha.

How To Get There:. This place is a short distance from Khonha (see map no. BM 84)

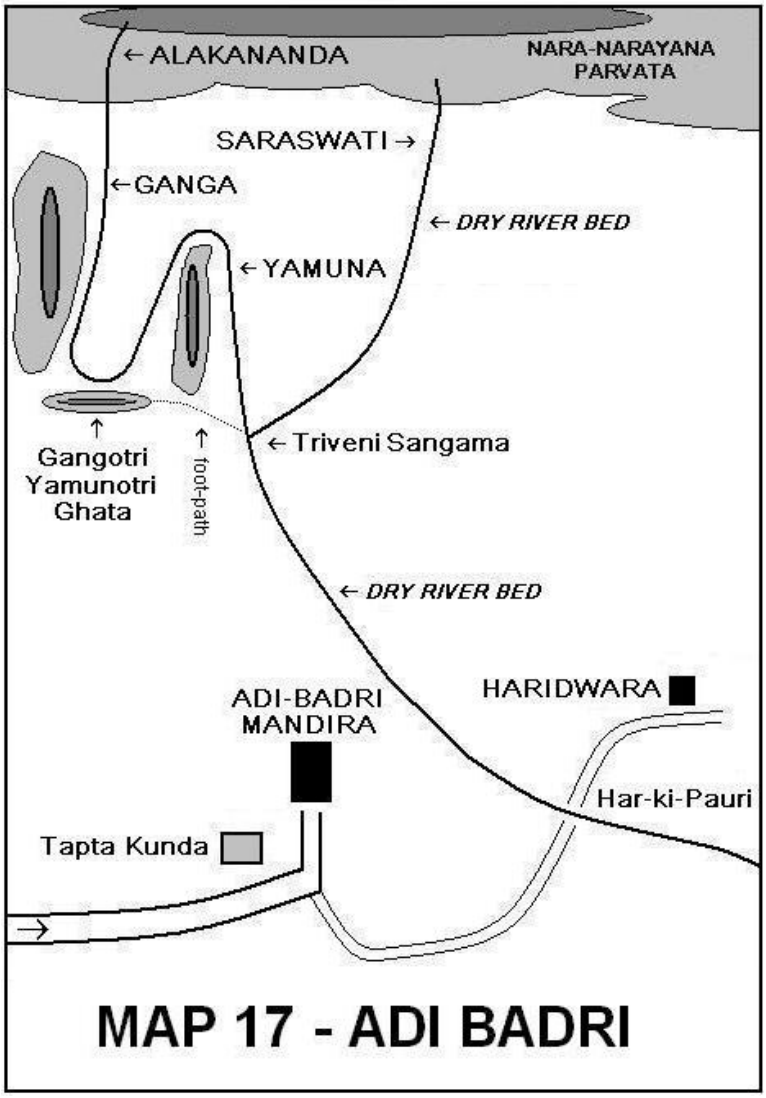
BM.33 **ADIBADRI GRAMA (Alipura)**

This village was formerly known as Adibadri Grama, but during the Mughal rule it was changed to Alipura. This is the place where the Himalayas of Vraja known as the Adi-Badri Range begin to rise and it also marks the gateway to Adi Badrinatha Dhama, which lies just one kilometer to the south.

How To Get There: This village is 1.5km west from Khoh (see map no. BM 84)

BM.34 **ADI-BADRINATHA (Badrikashrama)**

This is one of the more isolated and wildly beautiful parts of Vraja, being surrounded with tree lined hills and dense forests. It is also the haunt of hundreds of peacocks and a variety of exotic birds, besides many species of wild animals. Nestled in the heart of this



exotic landscape is the famous shrine of Adi-Badrinatha, dedicated to Lord Nara and Narayana Rishi, the twin incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It is said that this holy *tirtha* was re-discovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta. Lord Nara and Narayana are the predominating deities of Bharata-varsa (India) and are worshiped eternally by Narada Muni at Badrikashrama. It is also mentioned in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* that Krishna and Arjuna are both incarnations of Nara-Narayana Rishi. This refers to the Narayana feature of Krishna when the Lord is present at places outside Vrindavana like; Mathura, Dwaraka, Hastinapura, and on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, or whenever He is engaged in pastimes with Arjuna. Whenever Krishna kills the demons that enter Vrindavana, He does so in His Narayana-*rupa*.

The word *'adi'* means 'first' or 'original' and Adi-Badrinatha in Vraja is considered to be the original Badrinatha. This is because Vrindavana Dhama and all its holy places are part of the eternal spiritual sky and therefore not created at any time, unlike the temporary

material world, which is created at a particular time. All the incarnations of Godhead have descended from the spiritual world and when They descend, They bring with Them their own original abodes or Dhamas. Therefore, all incarnations and holy Dhamas have their origins in the spiritual world. And just as Lord Shri Krishna has His eternal abode in Goloka Vrindavana, Lord Nara-Narayana are eternally residing at Badrinatha Dhama situated in one of the Vaikuntha planets.

On the *simhasana* in the Adi-Badrinatha temple can be seen the deity of Lord Nara in His *'chatur-bhuja'* form with four arms holding the four symbols of Vishnu that includes a lotus, *chakra,* conch, and club. Next is the deity of Lord Narayana, who is sitting in the *yoga-asana*, or the meditation pose. Next is Shriman Uddhava, Krishna's dear friend who after Krishna's departure from the world, went to the Himalayas to take refuge of Nara-Narayana Rishi at Badrikashrama. Other deities that can be seen here include Shrila Narada Muni, the '*rishi* amongst the demigods', who, during the winter season when it snows in the Himalayas and humans cannot stay there, takes over as the temple *pujari* to perform the *seva-puja* of Lord Nara-Narayana. Next is Kuvera the treasurer of the demigods, whose ancient kingdom on earth was situated in the Himalayas north of Badrinatha, and who also performs the duties of a *pujari* during winter. In the same temple are deities of Shri Shri Radha Krishna and also Lord Shri Nathji holding Govardhana Hill. There is also a deity of Annapurna Devi, the mountain-goddess of the Himalayas who has a range of mountains named after Her.

Situated in the compound of the shrine can be found the Tapta-kunda, the water of which is stone-cold the whole year round and bathing there is always a great *tapasya*. The word *'tapta'* or *'tapa'* is derived from the word *'tapasya'* which means 'austerity'. Paradoxically, the *kundas* at Badrinatha in the Himalayas are boiling-hot due to underground sulphur springs, and bathing there is another type of *tapasya*. The water of these sulphur *kundas* is so hot that *sadhus* often cook food like rice, chapatti doe, and vegetables, within the *kunda* by wrapping the items in cloth and then lowering it into the steaming hot water.

It is mentioned in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, that after His appearance on earth, Lord Nara-Narayana Rishi went to meditate and perform *tapasya* on the Gandhamadana Mountain, which is sometimes called the Nara-Narayana Parvata. The word *'parvata'* also means mountain. That same Gandhamadana Mountain is also present here at Adi-Badrinatha, along with all the other important holy places seen in the Himalayan ranges in Northern India, including; Trikut Parvata, Nishada Parvata and Keshava Parvata, the holy rivers Alakananda (Ganga), Yamuna, and Saraswati, the holy places Haridwara and Har-ki-pauri, Rishikesh, Lakshmana-jhula and Tapovana. There is also the famous Triveni Sangama and Dashashmavedha Ghata. Adi-Badri is also mentioned to be one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vraja.

How To Get There: Adi-Badrinatha is 1.5km south of Alipur, 15km from Dig, and 50km from Vrndavana (see map no. 17)

The Apsaras Tempt Nara-Narayana Rishi

Isolated high in the Himalayas is the abode of Nara-Narayana Rishi known as Badrinatha Dhama, or sometimes as Badrikashrama. At this place, Lord Nara-Narayana Rishi, who is a strict *niashtika brahmachari*, is engaged in severe penance for the benefit of the entire human race. Once, the demigod Indra who is the king of heaven became extremely envious of the extraordinary *tapasya* being undertaken by Nara-Narayana Rishi. King Indra was thinking that Nara-Narayana Rishi was some ordinary *yogi* undergoing austerity to achieve the heavenly planets. Indra always feared that some extra-ordinary man or powerful yogi, after performing severe *tapasya* and austerities, might try to usurp his position as the King of heaven along with his great wealth. Every wealthy man fears losing his money and property, and due to anxiety cannot sleep peacefully at night. Similarly, a man with an exalted post in society dreads to lose his high status and engages in all kinds of political intrigue simply to save his position. Indra was no different and therefore plotted the downfall of Nara-Narayana Rishi.

Due to the fear of losing his position, Indra the King of heaven, sent many beautiful dancing girls known as Apsaras to seduce Nara-Narayana Rishi in the hope of making Him

fall-down to lusty desires and abandon His severe penance. The dancing girls from heaven arrived scantily clad before Nara-Narayana Rishi and started to perform their highly erotic dance performance. With their ankle bells ringing melodiously as they danced, the Apsaras did their utmost to seduce the great Rishi from his meditation; nevertheless, Nara-Narayana Rishi remained completely absorbed in s*amadhi*. While dancing before the great Rishi, the Apsaras suddenly saw many more beautiful girls appearing from the body of Nara-Narayana Rishi, and their beauty easily defeated the beauty of the heavenly Apsaras. Seeing this powerful display of mysticism, and having failed in their attempts to seduce Nara-Narayana Rishi, the Apsaras immediately returned to Indra's abode in the heavenly planets.

This incident proves that the Supreme Lord can never be brought under the control of a beautiful woman, because He Himself is the original creator and source of all the beautiful women in the universe, and this particular creation forms only a minute aspect of His total creative energy. This episode also helps clarify Krishna's position in regard to the *gopis* of Vrindavana, who are all expansions of Krishna's own spiritual body for the purpose of His transcendental enjoyment of *prema-rasa* or divine love. This exhibition of the Lord's *prema-rasa* is always misunderstood by materialists, who foolishly equate Krishna's *gopi-lila* pastimes, with their own pursuit of gross sexual pleasure. This misunderstanding is due to the failure to realize the scientific difference between spiritual *prema-rasa* and the materialistic *kama-rasa*. When the pure spirit soul falls from the spiritual world, his original love of God (*prema*) becomes perverted by contact with the material energy and is transformed into lust (*kama*). The goal of *bhakti*-yoga is to purify the soul of mundane lust (*kama*) in order to regain the souls original platform of *prema,* pure love for God.

Lord Krishna Visits Badrinatha with Nanda Maharaja

One day Nanda Maharaja, Krishna's father, had a great desire to go on pilgrimage and take *darshana* of Badrinatha Dhama in the Himalayas. According to the Vedic custom, the four Vaikuntha Dhamas in India (Bharata-varsha) should be visited by all religious people at least once before they die. These four Dhamas are; Badrinatha, Dwaraka, Jagannatha Puri, and Rameshwaram, and they represent the planets of Lord Vishnu in the spiritual world. The Dhama of Vrindavana represents the Lord's supreme abode on the planet called Goloka-Vrindavana which is far beyond the realm of Vaikuntha.

However, Krishna did not like the idea that His father should leave Vrindavana and therefore asked Him why he should take so much trouble to go all the way to the Himalayan Mountains, when the very same Badrinatha Dhama was present in Vraja. Krishna then brought Nanda Baba and all the *Vrajavasis* to this place and declared its glories before them, saying that this was the original Badrinatha and was thousands of times more spiritually potent than the Badrinatha in the Himalayas. When Nanda Maharaja wanted to leave Vrindavana to bathe in the River Ganges, Krishna objected and instead took his father to Manasi Ganga at Govardhana. Krishna was conveying the message that one should never leave Vrindavana, because Vrindavana itself is the greatest of all the holy places within the material universe, and every other holy place in the universe has its original form in Vrindavana. Some of the original holy places found in this part of Vraja include; Kedarnatha, Gaya, Pushkara, Dwaraka, Kashi, Prayag and Rameshwaram, which are all located near Kamyavana.

BM.35 **PASOPA (Parsopa)**

The beautiful and tranquil landscape of this area with its rolling hills and rustic forests is truly breathtaking. Situated on a nearby hill overlooking the village is the temple of Shri Shri Jugala-kishore, which refers to the dual form of Radha and Krishna, entwined together in a loving embrace. The name of the village has been derived from the words *'pa'* meaning 'hoof-print' and *'pashu'*, meaning an 'animal' such as a cow. Or in other words *'pasopa'* means the 'hoof-print of cows'.

One day, when Krishna and Balarama were herding their cows in a nearby forest, Krishna wanted to show Balarama just how much their cowherd boyfriends really loved Them. Therefore, while the cowherd boys were absorbed in playing games, unseen by them,

Krishna took Balarama to another forest. However the cows noticed that Krishna and Balarama were leaving for another forest and while still grazing on the grass, slowly followed behind Them.

While absorbed in playing games, suddenly the cowherd boys realized that both Krishna and Balarama had disappeared along with all the cows. They immediately stopped playing and started searching from one grove to the next. Becoming almost mad at the loss of their two dear friends, they began shedding tears in separation and crying out the names of Krishna and Balarama. While franticly searching throughout the forest, the cowherd boys noticed the *'pashu-pa'*, or hoof-prints of the cows. They then started to follow these tracks which led them to this village where they suddenly saw Krishna and Balarama waiting with open arms to greet them. The great misery that had momentarily engulfed them immediately dissipated as they embraced Krishna and Balarama to their hearts content. Thus Krishna was able to show Balarama just how much the cowherd boys actually loved Them.

How To Get There: Pasopa is 3km north of Alipur and 6km west of Khonha (see map no. BM 84)

BM.36 **KEDARANATHA**

Situated on the top of a hill is this shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva which contains a Shiva-*linga* known as Kedaranatha Mahadeva. One has to climb up three hundred steps to reach the shrine where one gets a panoramic view of the surrounding country-side. This place is considered to be the original Kedaranatha, which like Adi-Badrinatha, has its expansion in the Himalayas. This shrine is situated inside a cave where one can have *darshana* of the Shiva-*linga* of Kedarnatha Mahadeva and his eternal consort Parvati Devi. Nearby is a small pond known as Gauri-kunda. This holy *tirtha* and the deity of Lord Shiva are said to have been discovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta.

How To Get There: This shrine is 10km north of Pasopa and 1km west of Vilonda (see map no. BM 84)

BM.37 **CHARANA PAHADI**

Situated on top of a large hill which is considered to be a divine manifestation of Lord Shiva, one can see the lotus foot-prints of Lord Shri Krishna impressed upon a rock. In the same area, besides Krishna's lotus foot-prints, one can also see the foot-prints of the *gopis,* the cowherd boys, and the cows. The word *'charana'* means 'lotus feet' and *'pahadi'* means a 'small mountain', or a 'hill'. Sometimes this place is also called Charana-chinha; the word *'chinha'* means that the impression of the Lord's lotus feet is 'indented' on the rocks. This is the most famous amongst the three 'Charana Pahadis' found in Vraja.

Lord Krishna used to come to this area for grazing His cows along with the cowherd boys. One day Krishna climbed to the top of the hill and started playing on His flute. The enchanting sound of Krishna's flute immediately captivated the minds of the *gopis* who were bathing at a nearby *kunda*, and they immediately started to climb the hill in search of Krishna. The cowherd boys also became attracted by the sound of Krishna's flute and they also began to climb the hill to search for Krishna. Similarly, the cows also became enchanted by Krishna's flute and they also made their way to the top of the hill. At that same time the hill also became completely enchanted by the sound of Krishna's flute and began to melt in ecstasy. The place where Krishna stood became so soft that His lotus feet became indented on the rock. Similarly, because all the *gopis*, the cowherd boys, and the cows, were also standing on top of the hill, their foot-prints also became indented on the rocks.

From the top of the hill one can see Dhyana-kunda where Shri Krishna meditated on His beloved Radha. In the far distance is Luk-luki-kunda where Krishna and the *gopis* would play hide and seek. One can also see Vihvala-kunda where Radha became overwhelmed after having heard the enchanting sound of Krishna's flute. Nearby is Krida-kunda where Krishna played games with his friends and also the five *kundas* named after Krishna's friends called the Pancha-sakha-kundas, which are also known as the Gopa-kundas. These five friends include; Rangila, Chabila, Jakila, Matila, and Datila. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* mentions Shridama as one of the five. In the distance is Ghosarani-kunda, where mother Yashoda's brother named Yashodhara gave his daughter in marriage. It is said that the whole area on this side of Kamyavana was being ruled by mother Yashoda's father whose name was Samukha

Maharaja. It is also said that Ghosarani-kunda is also connected to the family of Yashoda's mother whose name was Patala Devi.

How To Get There: Charana Pahadi is 3km along the *parikrama* path from Kedaranatha. It is 1.5km west of Vilond on the Jhanjpuri to Kaman road. From Kaman Town it is 3.5km on the road going to Gopalagarh just after passing through the village of Lahasar (see map no. 18)

BM.38 **LUKLUKANA-MICALI (Luk-luki-kunda)**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says there used to be a forest here named Luklukana-micali, where Radha and Krishna enjoyed many wonderful pastimes along with the *gopis*. There was also a very beautiful lake known as Luklukana-micali-kunda. The word *'michali'* means 'closed eyes', and *'luk-luka'* means 'hide and seek', and refers to the pastimes of 'hide and seek' that was played here by Krishna and the *gopis*. When the *gopis* would close their eyes Krishna would hide in the forest, or sometimes in a cave known as Luk-luki Kandara, or sometimes under the water of the *kunda*. Although the forest has now disappeared the *kunda* is still visible.

One day the *gopis* challenged Krishna to a game in the *kunda*, the winner would be the one who could hold their breath and stay under water the longest. When Krishna and the *gopis* dipped their heads under the water, the *gopis* cheated and again popped their heads above the water waiting for Krishna to surface. When the *gopis* saw Krishna's head coming up from the water, they would immediately dip under the water and Krishna would think that He was the first to surface. The *gopis* would then pop their heads above the water and claim victory. This went on game after game and each time the *gopis* were victorious. In the next game the *gopis* placed a wager on their winning in the next round. Again everyone dipped below the water and once again the *gopis* cheated and popped their heads up waiting to see Krishna's head surface. Then, as the *gopis* waited for Krishna's head to surface, nothing happened. The *gopis* waited and waited, but Krishna's head did not come to the surface.

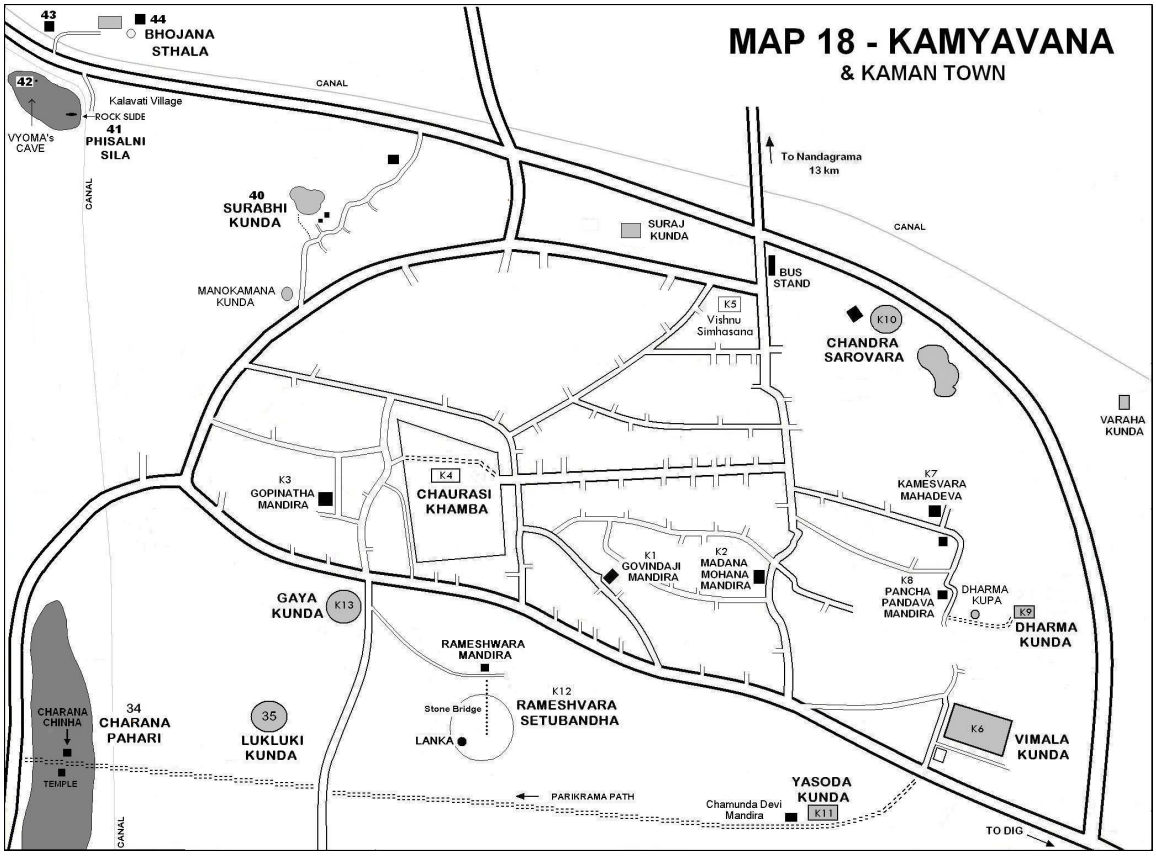
Suddenly realizing that Krishna may have drowned while trying to defeat the *gopis* in the game, they became distraught and franticly began searching in the water. Not finding Krishna in the *kunda*, they began searching on the land and in the nearby forest. Not finding Krishna either in the water or in the forest, or anywhere else, they began to lament and while shedding torrents of tears, began blaming themselves for Krishna's death. They condemned themselves over and over again for having played 'hide and seek' in the water and for having cheated in order to win the game, and thus they had now lost their beloved Krishna forever. Understanding that the *gopis* were deeply regretting their cheating in the game and were feeling devastated due to His loss, Krishna suddenly appeared before them and the *gopis* immediately forgot their lamentation and became ecstatic due to having got back the love of their lives.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 500mt from Charana Pahadi on the *parikrama* path going to Gaya-kunda and Kaman Town (see map no. 18)

BM.39 **KAMYAVANA (Kaman)**

Kamyavana is one of the sacred forests of Vraja. Presently the town of Kaman now stands on the spot where the ancient forest of Kamyavana once stood, although many of the beautiful *kundas* still survive, very little of the great forest now remains. Kamyavana, which is also called Kamavana, was the largest forests of Vrindavana with a *parikrama* of twenty kilometers. The word *'kamya'* means 'charming' and 'attractive' and the word *'vana'* means 'forest', therefore the name 'Kamyavana' means a very 'charming and attractive forest. In the *Adi-varaha Purana*, it says that the forest of Kamyavana can fulfill all the desires of the devotees as well as the demigods, and any pilgrim who visits this forest becomes glorified even in Vishnuloka. The *Skanda Purana* says that anyone who bathes in the *kundas* of the sacred Kamyavana forest will certainly achieve all his desires. In the *Vraja-riti-cintamani* it says. **"Because of the many charming *(kamya*) forests, groves, and lakes, where Lord Krishna relishes the sweetness of His pastimes, this place is known as Kamyavana."**

According to the *Puranas*, Lord Gopinatha, who is also known as Lord Kamadeva or Cupid, is the presiding deity of Kamavana (Kamyavana) and therefore the word *'kama'* in the name 'Kamavana' refers to Lord Gopinatha the transcendental Cupid. The *'kama'* in Kamavana also refers to the transcendental *'kama'*, or desire of the *gopis* to fully satisfy the desires of Lord Gopinatha. This spiritual *kama* of the *gopis* is completely different from mundane *kama* (lust) of this material world. Some *Puranas* also mention that there were over three hundred sacred *kundas* as well as over one hundred *simhasanas* in the forest of Kamyavana. The word '*simhasana'* can mean a throne as well as the altar in a temple. The *Vishnu Purana* says that there are a total of eighty four sacred *kundas* and eighty four sacred *simhasanas* in Kamyavana forest.



Nanda Maharaja stayed at Kamyavana for sometime while on his journey from Shakatikara to Nandagrama and it is said that Krishna enjoyed a number of His boyhood pastimes in this forest. It is also said that the Pandavas spent some time living at Kamyavan during the period of their exile and some of the pastimes mentioned in the Mahabharata actually took place at Kamyavana. It is said by some that the Pandavas also spent some of their childhood living in the area of Kamyavana. The *Puranas* mention that the Pandavas spent over five years of their exile in this region moving between two great forests known as Kamyaka and Dwaita that encompassed an area covering modern-day Haryana and Northern Rajasthan. The forest of Kamyavana would have been on the southern periphery of these great forests. During the final year of their exile, the Pandavas lived incognito in the nearby kingdom of Matsya, situated around the present day Jaipura-Alwara-Bharatapur region of Western Rajasthan that was being ruled by King Virat who was a member of the Yadava confederacy.

Kamyavana also became celebrated as the place where the three important deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis namely; Govindaji, Gopinatha, and Madana-mohana, and Vrinda Devi, were kept when they were secretly smuggled out of Vrindavana in bullock carts, just prior to an attack on the holy city by soldiers of the tyrant Emperor Aurangzeb in 1670. After some time when it became safe the deities were then taken from Kamyavana to the Hindu kingdom of Rajasthan that was still ruled by Hindu Rajput kings. Only the deity of Vrinda Devi was not taken to Rajasthana and remained at Kamyavana. Due to the great transcendental pleasure that the local people had experienced by having the deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis worshiped in their town, it was decided to establish temples containing the *'pratibhu-murtis'* of these three deities, which are the empowered replicas of the original deities. Therefore, the temples of Govindaji, Gopinatha, and Madana-mohana were duly established here at Kamyavana and the original deity of Vrinda Devi, who stayed behind, was subsequently installed in the temple of Govindaji.

How To Get There: Kamyavana is 55km northwest of Vrindavana, 9km from Varsana, 11km from Nandgoan and 23km from Dig. The quickest way to get there from Vrindavana is to go to Chhatikara and then by the Agra to Delhi road (N.H.2.) to Chatta, and then turn left on the road to Nandagrama and then continue to Kaman (See map no. 18)

KAMYAVANA INTERIOR PARIKRAMA

K.1 Govindaji Mandira / Vrinda Devi

Here in this temple one can see the original deity of Vrinda Devi alongside the *'pratibhu-murti'* of Lord Govindaji and also a deity of Lord Jagannatha Swami. When the deities of the Gaudiya Goswamis were brought from Vrindavana, they were kept at different locations in Kaman Town for safety. At this particular location, the deities of Govindaji and Vrinda Devi were kept for three days before Govindaji was moved to Jaipura. When the *pujaris* tried to move the deity of Vrinda Devi, she became too heavy to move, and the *pujaris* realized that Vrinda Devi, the presiding deity of Vrindavana forest, was not willing to leave the holy Dhama. Therefore, Vrinda Devi was then installed along with the *pratibhu-murti* of Govindaji in this temple.

This very beautiful deity of Vrinda Devi has ten arms holding her various symbols and is said to have been originally installed in Vrindavana by King Vajranabha, five thousand years earlier. During the course of history, the deity was lost but was subsequently rediscovered in Brahma-kunda by Shrila Rupa Goswami after she appeared in a dream informing him where she lay hidden. Rupa Goswami then installed Vrinda Devi in the Govindaji Mandira in Vrindavana. Vrinda Devi is the *gopi* after whom the forest of Vrindavana has been named (the *vana* of Vrinda) and along with Purnamasi, Vrinda Devi is responsible for making all the various arrangements for the loving pastimes between Radha and Krishna within the groves of Vrindavana. Shrimati Tulasi Devi is considered to be the partial expansion of Vrinda Devi, who is herself an expansion of Yogamaya Devi.

How To Get There: This temple is in the centre of Kaman on a secluded back road not far from Chaurasi Khamba. (see map no 18)

K.2 Madana-mohana Temple

In this temple one can see the *'pratibhu-murti'* of Lord Madana-mohana. The original deity of Madana-mohana was worshiped at Dwadashaditya Tila in Vrindavana by Shrila Sanatana Goswami. The deity was originally established by King Vajranabha around five thousand years earlier, but in the course of time was lost and rediscovered by Shrila Adwaita Acharya, at the place known as Adwaita Vat. He in turn arranged for a *brahmana* living in Mathura named Choube to continue the *seva-puja* or daily worship of the deity when he returned for Nadia. When Sanatana Goswami arrived in Vrindavana, he received instructions in a dream from Madana-mohana that he should personally perform the *seva-puja* and bring the deity back to Vrindavana, within a short time a temple was built for Lord Madana-mohana on the Dwadashaditya Tila. Some years later due to an imminent attack on Vrindavana by the Muslim tyrant Aurangzeb in 1670, the deity of Madana-mohana was moved along with Govindaji and Gopinathaji to Kamyavana, and remained in the town for

three or four days before being taken to Jaipura. Later the deity of Madana-mohana was again moved to Kiraoli near Bharatapura, where the deity is presently being worshiped.

How To Get There: This temple is not far from the Govindaji Mandira on the road going towards Vimala-kunda (see map no. 18)

K.3 Gopinatha Temple

In this temple can be seen the *'pratibhu-murti'* of Lord Gopinatha. The original deity of Lord Gopinatha was established by King Vajranabha around four thousand years earlier in Vrindavana, but like the other important deities that he established, was in due course of time lost. The deity was again rediscovered at Vamsi Vata in Vrindavana by Madhu Pandita Goswami a close associate of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who reestablished the worship of Lord Gopinatha. When the deities of the Gaudiya Goswami's were moved from Vrindavana due to the fear of an attack by the soldiers of Aurangzeb in 1669, the deity of Lord Gopinatha was brought to Kamyavana along with Govindaji and Madana-mohana. Lord Gopinatha is presently being worshiped in Jaipura. The exquisitely beautiful and all-attractive Lord Gopinatha, who is also referred to as being the transcendental Cupid or Kamadeva, is considered to be the presiding deity of Kamyavana forest.

How To Get There: This temple is situated behind the Chaurasi Khamba and a short distance from Gaya-kunda (see map no. 18)

K.4 Chaurasi Khamba (Nanda Bhavana)

The word *'chaurasi'* means eighty-four and *'khamba'* means pillars, in other words a palace with eighty-four stone pillars. This ancient ruin is one of the famous landmarks of Kaman Town and lies on a hilltop between the Govindaji and Gopinatha temples. It is said that this palace was built by the celestial architect Vishvakarma and was one of the three palaces of Nanda Maharaja, the others being Gokula and Nandagrama. It appears very similar to King Nanda's palace at Gokula, but on a much larger scale. The Chaurasi Khamba at Kamyavana is said to have been discovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta, the author of *Vraja-bhakti-vilasa* and a great authority on Vraja. During the Islamic rule it was used as a mosque and some local historians claim that it was built by a local Hindu king who excavated and reestablished many important holy places at Kamyavana including Vimala-kunda, but as historical records are almost non-existent such claims are difficult to substantiate. Some historians have said it was used by the Pandavas during their exile while others have said it was originaly built by Mother Yashoda's forefathers who ruled the area around Kamyavana.

How To Get There: This place is in the centre of Kaman Town and situated at the far end of the main bazaar (see map no. 18)

K.5 Vishnu Simhasana

This is the most famous of the one hundred ancient s*imhasanas* of Kamyavana. The word *'simhasana'* means the 'lion's seat' and generally refers to the platform or altar on which the temple deities are situated. The word '*simhasana'* can also mean the 'throne of a king'. The Vishnu Simhasana is the place where the marriage ceremony of Lord Narayana and the goddess Lakshmi Devi is celebrated by the people of Kaman every year. Situated nearby was the famous Charana-kunda where Krishna once washed His lotus feet, but this *kunda* has now disappeared.

How to Get There: This shrine is near the main bus stand on the road from Kosi (see map no. 18)

K.6 Vimala-kunda

When Nanda Maharaja stayed at Kamyavana, Krishna and Balarama used to graze their cows nearby and along with their friends, They enjoyed playing games and sporting in Vimala-kunda. This is the largest and most well maintained of the *kundas* at Kamyavana, and also the most famous. In the *Adi-varaha Purana* it is said. **"By bathing in Vimala-kunda, all one's sins are destroyed and on leaving the body will attain My eternal abode."** There are many important shrines situated around this sacred *kunda* including those dedicated to; Dauji, Surya-Narayana, Nilakanteshwara, Kamyavana-bihari, Govardhana-natha, Madana-

gopala, Murli-manohara, Vimala-bihari, Vimala Devi, Ganga Devi, Yamuna Devi and Gopalaji. In the month of *Karttik* on the occasion of the second *dvadashi* day, a festival is held here and thousands flock to Vimala-kunda where *ghee* lamps are offered to the sacred *kunda* along with flowers, and numerous other offerings.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 500mt east of the Kaman Town on the road to Dig (see map no. 18)

The Appearance of Vimala-kunda

There is a story related in the *Puranas* regarding the appearance of Vimala-kunda. Once during *'chaturmasya'*, all the sacred *'tirthas'* or holy places in the world visited Kamyavana to pay their homage to Krishna, but the sacred lake Pushkara Tirtharaja failed to come. Therefore, in order to compensate for Pushkara Tirtha's failure to appear, Krishna caused a very powerful jet of water to come shooting out of the ground which eventually created a large *kunda*. Within that flow of water, a very beautiful young girl appeared and began to serve Krishna in different ways. In no time a lake formed and after sporting and enjoying various pastimes in the lake with the beautiful young girl, Krishna blessed her saying that from this day onwards, she would be known as Vimala Devi and this sacred *kunda* would be named after her, and by bathing only once in this *kunda*, it would be equal to bathing seven times in the sacred lake of Pushkara The *Puranas* say that the goddess Vimala Devi eternally resides here in this holy *kunda.*

There is another famous story related in the *Bhavisya Purana* as well as the *Garga Samhita* concerning Vimala-kunda. It is said during the advent of Lord Krishna, there was a noble and pious king from the city of Campak Nagari in Sindhu-desa named Raja Vimala, who although he had many wives, he had no children. On petitioning the great ascetic Yajnavalkya Rishi, the king was blessed with sixteen thousand beautiful daughters. It is said that all these girls had in their previous life been living in Ayodhya and had desired Lord Ramacandra as their husband. When the time came to select husbands for his daughters, the king was advised by Yajnavalkya to approach Shri Krishna, who was the only person who was actually qualified to accept such highly cultured and beautiful princesses.

Lord Krishna immediately accepted the king's proposal and brought all the princesses from Campak Nagari to the beautiful forest of Kamyavana. It is said that Krishna expanded Himself to be with each and every princess and enjoyed endless pastimes in Kamyavana forest, including the celebrated *'rasa-lila'*. The long-cherished desire of the beautiful princesses, to serve Lord Rama in a conjugal relationship was thus fulfilled by Lord Krishna in Kamyavana forest. The tears of happiness that flooded from the eyes of those beautiful princesses is said to have created a large *kunda* that became celebrated as Vimala-kunda. It is said that anyone who is fortunate enough to bathe in the tear-filled Vimala-kunda, will certainly have all their desires fulfilled.

In order to clarify the various stories about the appearance of Vimala-kunda, as well as other histories of Krishna's pastimes here and elsewhere in Vraja, the local *panditas* have said that these histories of Kamyavana relate to different time periods and cover at least five different *kalpas.* This is because Krishna appears on earth to perform His pastimes once in a day of Brahma, and that sacred places like Vimala-kunda may appear in each and every *kalpa* (day of Brahma). As the *Puranas* are not recorded in any chronological order, it sometimes creates confusion for those reading the *Puranic* histories. The learned *panditas* have also ascertained that in each of the different *kalpas,* Krishna's pastimes have been centered in different parts of Vrindavana Dhama. The *panditas* say that in a previous *kalpa*, Kamyavana was the focal point of Krishna's pastimes, in another *kalpa* it was Chandra-sarovara, and in this present *kalpa* it was Seva Kunja in Vrindavana, where the *maha rasa-lila* pastimes took place.

Durvasa Muni Visits the Pandavas at Kamyavana

During their time in exile, after having been banished from their kingdom by Duryodhana, the Pandava brothers; Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva, along with their wife Princess Draupadi, stayed for some time in the sacred forest of Kamyavana. One day while visiting the city of Hastinapura, the great ascetic Durvasa Muni was very

pleased with the reception given by Duryodhana, and offered him a boon. Duryodhana then requested that Durvasa and his ten thousand disciples should visit his cousin brothers the Pandavas, who were at that time staying in the forest at Kamyavana. Duryodhana asked Durvasa to reach the Pandavas residence by the third *'prahara'* of the day so that he and his disciples could be fed a very sumptuous meal that would be prepared by Princess Draupadi. The evil minded Duryodhana knew full well that Draupadi would have finished serving lunch by then and unaware that Durvasa was coming for lunch. Duryodhana's despicable plan was that because Durvasa Muni was very easily angered, he would arrive too late to get a meal and would therefore become angry and pronounce a curse the Pandava's.

In due course of time, Durvasa arrived with his disciples at the time given by Duryodhana. After greeting the Pandavas, Durvasa informed Yudhisthira that before taking his lunch, he and his disciples would first take their bath in Vimala-kunda. After Durvasa left to take his bath, Draupadi informed Yudhisthira that there was no more food available to feed Durvasa, what to speak of his ten thousand disciples. Even though Draupadi possessed a magical cooking pot, given to her by Surya the sun-god, and which could produce inexhaustible amounts of food, but only as long as there was still some food remaining inside it. Once it was washed clean, the pot could no longer produce any more food. In great anxiety, Draupadi began to cry, fearing that on his return from bathing, Durvasa would undoubtedly curse the Pandavas for not having received him in the proper manner, and for not providing food for him and his hungry disciples.

Being a great devotee of the Lord, Draupadi began to pray to Krishna for help to save her husband's. Just at that moment, Lord Shri Krishna arrived there to meet the Pandavas and upon hearing about their dilemma, He requested Draupadi to bring Him the sun-god's inexhaustible cooking pot. Draupadi informed Krishna that the magical pot had already been washed and there was no food remaining inside it. Nevertheless, Krishna insisted that the pot be brought to Him. On inspecting it, Krishna discovered a minute particle of leafy vegetable stuck on the side of the pot and immediately ate it. He then smilingly told Bhima to call Durvasa and all his disciples. Meanwhile, on the banks of the *kunda*, Durvasa and all his disciples having finished bathing, were suddenly feeling completely bloated, as if they had just eaten a very large meal. Not feeling even slightly hungry, and not wanting to insult Yudhisthira Maharaja by refusing to eat the meal that he thought must have been prepared for him, Durvasa and his ten thousand disciples immediately slipped away from Kamyavana unseen by anyone.

K.7 **Karmeshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

This ancient temple of Lord Shiva is one of the four famous '*dig-pala'* deities that were established by King Vajranabha to give protection to the holy Dhama. The word *'dig'* means direction and *'pala'* means protector. The other *'dig-pala'* deities are Bhuteshwara in Mathura, Chakreshwara in Govardhana, and Gopishwara in Vrindavana.

How To Get There: This temple situated on a back street and is not far from Vimala-kunda (see map no. 18)

K.8 **Pancha Pandava Mandira**

This temple near to the Kameshwara Mahadeva Mandira is dedicated to the five Pandavas and is also known as the Dharmaraja Mandira. The name Dharmaraja is another name of Yudhisthira, as he was religion (*dhama*) personified as well as the son of Dharmaraja (Yamaraja). Some local *panditas* say that this was the spot where the Pandavas actually lived during their stay at Kamyavana while undergoing their period of exile.

How To Get There: This temple is near the Kameshwara Mandira (seemap no. 18)

K.9 **Dharma-kunda (Pancha Pandava-kunda)**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says**. "This is Dharma-kunda where Narayana in the form of Dharma performs indescribable pastimes."** The sacred Dharma-kunda is also known as Pancha Pandava-kunda. The word *'dharma'* means 'pure religion' as well as 'religious duties', and the name *'Pancha Pandava'* refers to Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva, the five *(pancha*) sons of Maharaja Pandu, who were collectively known as the

Pandava brothers. This is a small *kunda* situated in an isolated area surrounded by open fields. There is also an ancient throne here which local people say is known as Vishoka Simhasana and belongs to Dharmaraja. There is also a large well known as Dharma-kupa. The word *'kupa'* means a 'well'.

How To Get There: Dharma-kunda is about 250mt from the Karmeswara Mandira and is situated in a field some distance from the road (see map no. 18)

A Yaksha Tests Yudhisthira Maharaja

Is has been said that when the Pandavas first arrived at Kamyavana after having traveled a great distance, they all felt very thirsty and Maharaja Yudhisthira asked Bhima to bring some water for Draupadi and his brothers in a pot. Bhima arrived on the bank of this *kunda* and was about to draw water, when a Yaksha appeared there and forbade him to take the water without first answering a riddle, otherwise he would immediately die. Not caring for the words of the Yaksha, the thirsty Bhima began to drink water and immediately fell down dead. After Bhima had not returned, Yudhisthira sent Arjuna to fetch the water. Arjuna arrived at the *kunda* and was about to drink water when the same Yaksha appeared and forbade him to drink the water, without first answering a riddle, otherwise he would immediately die. Being very thirsty, Arjuna ignored the Yaksha and as he began to drink the water, he fell down dead. As Arjuna did not return with any water, Yudhisthira sent Nakula who also met the same fate. Yudhisthira then sent Sahadeva and when he did not return, he decided to go himself to bring water.

Arriving on the banks of the *kunda*, he suddenly noticed his brothers lying either dead or unconscious at different spots around the *kunda*. The same Yaksha suddenly appeared before Yudisthira and also forbade him to drink water without first answering a riddle, otherwise like his brothers he would also die. Yudhisthira agreed to answer the Yaksha's riddle, and one by one answered each of the riddles correctly.

The riddles asked by the Yaksha and the answers Yudisthira gave are as follows:

Who raises the sun? - Brahma raises the sun.
What is heavier than the earth? – One's mother.
What is higher than the sky? – One's father.
What travels faster than the wind? – One's mind.
What is more numerous than grasses on the earth? – The desires of the mind.
What is the best kind of dharma? – Mercy.
What is the best kind of forbearance? – To tolerate the dualities of life.
What is the worst enemy? – One's mind.
What is the worst disease? – One's greed.
Who is a holy man? - One who does good to all.
Who is not a holy man? - One who cannot control his senses.
Who is happy? – Those without debt, not living in a foreign land, and who can digest their food.
What is the greatest wonder? – Although a man sees all around him people are dying, even in youth and sometimes unexpectedly, yet he thinks that he will not die.
What is life's true path? – The path of the *mahabhagavata* is the true path for all.
What is newsworthy? – That time devours all men.

The Yaksha was very satisfied with Yudhisthira and informed him that as he had answered all the riddles correctly, he could revive one of his brothers. Yudhisthira then chose Nakula. The Yaksha was surprised by the choice, saying that surely it was better to choose either Arjuna or Bhima, as they were not only senior in age but also great warriors on the battlefield. Yudhisthira replied that as his father Maharaja Pandu had two wives, Kunti and Madri, and that because he himself was the son of Kunti, it was only right according to *dharma*, that one of Madri's sons should also live. Being very happy at Yudhisthira's perfect understanding of *dharma* and his choice of bringing Nakula back to life, the Yaksha declared that all of Yudhisthira's brothers could be brought back to life. At that moment the Yaksha revealed his true identity as Lord Yamaraja, who had appeared there in the form of a Yaksha just to test Maharaja Yudhisthira. Lord Yamaraja is also known as Dharmaraja, because he is

a Mahajana and the knower of all religious principles and the judge of all departed souls. Being the seminal father of Yudisthira Maharaja, he was extremely happy to see that his son was so firmly situated in the principles of *dharma*.

K.10 **Chandra-sarovara**

This very beautiful and isolated lake is also called Chandrabhaga-kunda and there is a famous temple of Shiva here known as Chandeshwara Mahadeva.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is some distance from the bus stand along the bypass road to Dig (see map no. 18)

K.11 **Yashoda-kunda**

In the *Bhakta-ratnakara* it says. **"Here is the supremely pure Yashoda-kunda where Krishna in jubilation, herded His cows."** It is said by some authorities that Samuka Maharaja, mother Yashoda's father, was at one time staying at this place and therefore she spent some of her childhood pastimes at this place. When Nanda Maharaja was moving from Gokula to Nandagrama, he camped at a few places including Shakatikara and also Dig, and when he arrived in Kamyavana, it is said that he camped at this place. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said**. "O King next is Kamyavana, where Lord Hari stayed in His childhood."** There is also a spot next to the *kunda* where it is said mother Yashoda used to churn butter and also wash her pots. There is an ancient temple here dedicated to Chamunda Devi, a form of goddess Kali.

There is a nice story about the potency of this sacred *kunda* mentioned in the *Adi-varaha Purana*. Once there was a *vaishya* (trader), who very expertly worshiped the *brahmanas* and consequently in his next life, he was born as a king. His name was Subhajit and his kingdom was known as Mahismati, but even though he had conquered all his enemies and accumulated great wealth, he was not happy. The reason for his unhappiness was due to not having a son and heir.

On behalf of the king, the royal priest went to the forest to consult the great ascetic Loma Rishi, who informed the priest that although the king was a very pious *vaishya* in his previous life, he had once committed an offence against a cow. Loma Rishi further explained that in his previous life, the *vaishya*, while on a business trip during the hot season, had became very thirsty and began searching for a well. After finding a well, the *vaishya* lowered a vessel into the well to draw water. At that moment, a cow also came there searching for water. Not caring for the cow, the *vaishya* quenched his thirst and continued on his journey thus neglecting the cow. Loma Rishi further explained that because in his previous life the *vaishya* had diligently worshiped the *brahmanas*, he was reborn as a king, but because he had neglected to serve the cow, he was childless.

Loma Rishi further advised the royal priest that he should take the king to the sacred forest of Kamyavana and take bath in the celebrated Yashoda-kunda, and thus the desires of the king would be fulfilled. The royal priest then arranged for the king to travel to Kamyavana and take bath in Yashoda-kunda. Within a short time, the wife of the king gave birth to a very beautiful baby boy, whose effulgence filled the four directions and brought unbounded happiness to King Subhajit, as well as the people of his kingdom. It has also been said in the *Puranas* that Yashoda-kunda is so supremely pure, that even if one does not take bath in the *kunda*, but simply hears about its glories, one will achieve the same result as if one had actually taken a bath there.

How To Get There: Yashoda-kunda is situated on the *parikrama* path from Vimala-kunda going towards Rameshwara and Gaya-kunda (see map no. 18)

K.12 **Rameshwara Setubandha**

Rameshwara Setubandha is the place in Kamyavana where Krishna enacted the pastimes of Lord Ramachandra. At this isolated spot one can see a temple of Lord Shiva known as Rameshwara Mahadeva, which represents the holy Dhama of Rameshwara in Southern India, and Setubandha is the place from where Lord Ramachandra built a stone bridge and crossed the Indian Ocean to the island of Lanka. This temple lies at one end of a stone bridge that ran across a small lake called Setubandha-sarovara, representing the

Indian Ocean, and lead to a small hill called Lanka Puri, representing the demon Ravana's fabled city of Lanka. At the present moment this lake is dry for most of the year, accept during the rainy season. The word *'setu'* means 'bridge' and *'bandha'* means to 'link-up'. Unfortunately most of the stones used to make the bridge have disappeared. There was also a small forest nearby known as Ashokavana, which represents the Ashoka garden in Lanka where Sita Devi was kept as a prisoner by Ravana.

One day Shri Krishna was enjoying pastimes with the *gopis* at this spot. At that moment a troupe of monkeys appeared from the nearby forest, and due to it being a very hot summer's day, the monkeys in order to cool off started to jump from the trees into the lake. Seeing the monkeys reminded Lalita-sakhi about the adventures of Lord Rama. She told Vishakha-sakhi, that once when the demon Ravana kidnapped Sita Devi and took her away to Lanka, the monkeys built a bridge out of large stones across the ocean and on the order of Lord Rama, all the stones miraculously floated on the water. Lord Rama and his army were then able to cross the ocean and reach Lanka by walking on those stones. Hearing the talks between Lalita and Vishakha, Krishna suddenly declared that He was that very same Lord Rama and that in His previous life He had appeared in Ayodhya as the son of Maharaja Dasaratha. The *gopis* started laughing at Krishna's boasting words and Lalita informed Krishna that if He was actually Lord Rama, He should take the help of the monkeys and immediately build a bridge by floating large stones over the lake, then only would the *gopis* believe that He was actually Lord Rama.

Taking up the challenge of the *gopis* and with the help of all the monkeys, Krishna assembled many large stones and after touching them with His lotus feet they began to float on the water, much to the amazement of the *gopis*, and within a short time a stone bridge had been erected across the lake. Seeing this wonderful and miraculous pastime, the *gopis* unanimously declared Krishna to be the very same Lord Ramachandra and gave the lake the name of Shri Rameshwara Setubandha. This same lake is also known as Lanka-kunda as well as Setubandha-sarovara. It is said that Shri Krishna personally established at one end of the stone bridge, the Shiva-*linga* known as Rameshwara Mahadeva, which represents Rameshwaram on the Indian side of the bridge, which was the place where Lord Ramachandra worshiped the deity of Shiva in order to kill the demon Ravana, who was a devoted follower of Shiva. From Rameshwara Setubandha there is a very good view of the former king of Kaman's palace known as the Sheel Mahal, or 'Eagle Palace', which is perched on top of same hill on which the Chaurasi Khambha is also located.

How To Get There: Rameshwara is situated in an isolated place on the *parikrama* path from Yashoda-kunda. to Gaya-kunda. It can also be reached from Gaya-kunda (see map no. 18)

K.13 **Gaya-Kunda**

This sacred *kunda* is situated on the outskirts of Kaman Town and it is one of the famous *kundas* of Kamyavana and considered to be the original Gaya, or Adi-Gaya, with its expansion situated in Bihar state, where Hindus traditionally offer *'pinda'* once a year to their departed forefathers. Nanda Maharaja used to come here to Gaya-kunda and offer *'pinda'* to his forefathers, as do many *Vrajavasis* even today. Some authorities have said that there are many different *kundas*, now invisible, that were situated around Gaya-kunda including; Prayaga-kunda, Kashi-kunda, Pushkara-kunda, Gomati-kunda, Mana-kunda, Balabhadra-kunda, Narada-kunda, and Dwaraka-kunda, which represent the various holy *tirthas* found in India. Others say these *kundas* were actually situated within Gaya-kunda depending at which side of Gaya-kunda one bathed, and it was possible to bathe in all these *kundas* one after another.

How To Get There: Gaya-kunda is 1km southwest of Kaman Town on the road to Jhanjpuri (see map no. 18)

KAMYAVANA EXTERIOR PARIKRAMA

BM.40 **SURABHI-KUNDA (Prabhodananda Saraswati Bhajana Kutira)**

The very beautiful and tranquil Surabhi-kund is the place where Prabhodananda Saraswati Goswami performed his *bhajana*. Prabhodananda Saraswati was a devoted

follower of Vaishnava Dharma and a prominent spiritual teacher belonging to Ramanuja's Shri *sampradaya* and hailed from Srirangama (Rangapatnam) in Southern India. He was the uncle as well as initiating spiritual master of Gopala Bhatta Goswami.

Shrila Prabhodananda Saraswati Goswami first met Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at Srirangam in Andhra Pradesh during the Lord's tour of South India, when He spent the rainy season staying at the house of Gopala Bhatta's father, Venkata Bhatta. At that time, Prabhodananda had the opportunity to associate with Lord Chaitanya and became so convinced about the Lord's mission and philosophy, that he left the Shri *sampradaya* and joined Mahaprabhu's Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*. After traveling to Vrindavana, he stayed there and spent the rest of his life in the service of the holy Dhama. He was an intimate associate of the Six Goswamis and wrote a number of important books on the science of *bhakti-yoga*. His s*amadhi* is at Kaliya Ghata in Vrindavana where he also performed *bhajana* towards the end of his life. The *Gaura-ganadesha-dipika* says that Prabhodananda Saraswati was one of the *ashta-sakhis* named Tungavidya Devi in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes.

How To Get There: (see map no. 18)

BM.41 **PICHALINI-SHILA (Kalavati)**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says**. "On Chandrasena-parvata is Pichalni-*shila*. At this place Krishna plays along with His friends. Sitting in a bending form they slid down the rock again and again."** Situated on the side of a hill is this natural rock slide that is used even today by the local children. Krishna and His friends used to come here for herding the cows and would enjoy many long hours playing on this slide. The word *'pichalni'* means 'sliding stone' and '*shila'* means a 'stone' or 'rock'. The hill on which the Pichalni-*shila* is found is known as Chandrasena Parvata, but is known locally as Pichal Pihari. The word *'pihari'* means a 'hill'. Locals also refer to this rock slide as Khisasini-*shila* or Pishalini-*shila*, which are both corruptions of the word Pichalni-*shila*.

The village of Kalavati is the place where the Pichalni-*shila* is located. The word *'kalavati'* means the 'place of the dance' and it was here where the *gopis* assembled and engaged in singing songs glorifying Krishna and dancing in circles with one-another. When Krishna heard the rhythmic jingling of the *gopi's* ankle bells and the sweet sound of their singing, He came here to witness the wonderful dance performance of the cowherd girls.

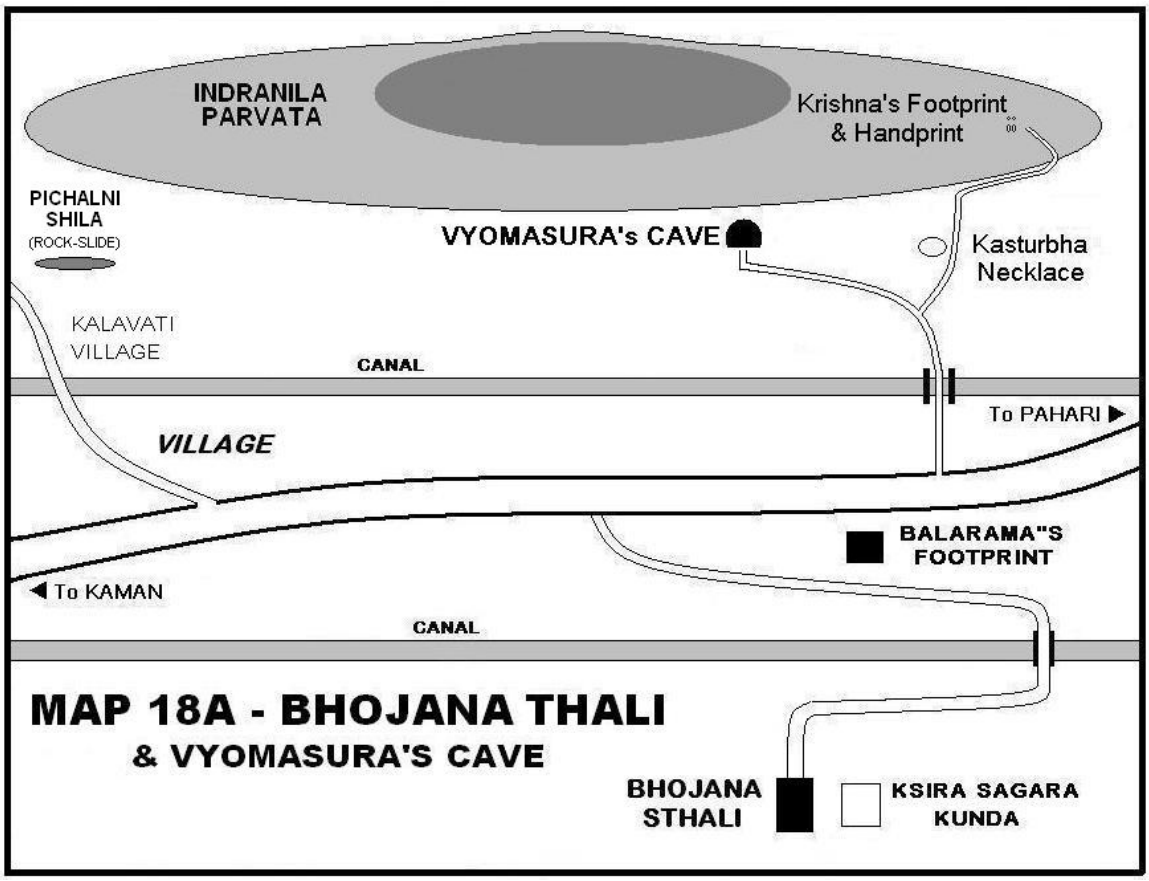
How To Get There: This place is 2km outside Kaman on the road to Pahari Town and situated behind the village of Kalavata (see map no. 18 & 18A)

BM.42 **VYOMASURA GUFA**

Situated on the side of a mountain is the cave or *gufa* of the demon Vyomasura. Also nearby are Krishna's lotus footprints, His lotus handprints, and the imprints of His flower garland and Kaustuba necklace. On the opposite side of the road are the lotus footprints of Lord Balarama. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* mentions that this is the site where Shri Krishna killed the great flying demon Vyomasura. This particular part of the mountain is known as Chaursya-khela Parvata because Krishna and the cowherd boys were playing the game (*khela*) of cops and robbers (*chaursya*).

The word *'vyoma'* refers to a type of demon or *asura* that by dint of mystic powers can fly in the sky at will. The demon Vyomasura, in his previous life, had been a king named Bhimaratha who ruled the kingdom of Kashi. He was a devotee of Lord Vishnu and was always performing sacrifices. Eventually he left the kingdom to his son and retired to perform penance on the Malaya Mountain. One day the great sage and son of Lord Brahma, Pulastya Muni, arrived at Bhimaratha's *ashrama*, but due to his false pride in being a great personality and performer of severe penances, Bhimaratha failed to receive the great sage in the proper manner and also neglected to either rise from his seat or offer any respects to such an exalted visitor. Infuriated at the insulting behavior of Bhimaratha, the great sage Pulastya cursed him by saying. "O great rascal, immediately become a demon." Within a short time, Bhimaratha left his body and in his next life took birth as Vyomasura, the son of the demon named Maya Danava.

During the despotic rule of King Kamsa, all the envious demons were engaged in helping him in consolidating his hold on power and expanding his dominance over other kings. The demon Vyomasura was also one of Kamsa's supporters and one day was asked by Kamsa to go to Vrindavana and kill the cowherd boy named Krishna. The *Bhagavatam* says that on that particular day, Krishna was at Govardhana Hill with His cowherd boyfriends



playing a game of 'cops and robbers'. In some *Puranas* it says Krishna was playing near Kamyavana, and this has been confirmed in the *Gopala-campu* of Shrila Jiva Goswami. Some boys played the part of police constables and some played the part of thieves and others played the part of lambs. The game involved the police trying to catch the thieves who were stealing the lambs. Arriving on the scene, Vyomasura, by dint his mystic power, assumed the form of a cowherd boy and played the part of a thief. One by one he began actually stealing the cowherd boys that were playing the part of lambs, and after carrying them away, hid them in a cave and rolled a big rock in front of the cave entrance to close it. Gradually the demon stole almost all of the cowherd boys playing with Krishna.

Krishna was wondering where all the cowherd boys have gone, as only four or five boys remained playing the game. Contemplating the situation, Krishna then noticed that a very cunning demon was masquerading as one of the cowherd boys. Without any warning Krishna suddenly caught hold of the demon in the same way that a lion snatches a lamb. Feeling the strong grip of Krishna and fearing for his life, the demon Vyomasura began to expand his body into a gigantic size and attempted to escape by flying high into the sky. Nevertheless, he could not free himself from Krishna's powerful grip. A fierce battle then ensued between the demon Vyomasura and Krishna, sometimes they fought on the land and sometimes in the sky. The whole earth began to shake as if an earthquake was about to

strike and Balarama had to press His foot down firmly on the ground to keep the earth steady. While the demon was flying in the sky, all of a sudden Krishna lost His grip and fell to the earth on all fours, leaving behind the imprints of His hands and feet, and also His broken flower garland and His *Kaustuba* necklace, which both fell off due to the fall. In an angry mood, Krishna suddenly reached up into the sky and catching the demon by the arm, pulled him downwards and slammed him into the ground with such force, that the demon died on the spot. Krishna then released all the cowherd boys from within the cave where they had been hidden.

Regarding the *Bhagavatam* saying that the cowherd boys were playing at Govardhana Hill, all the mountains in Vraja Mandala belong to one mountain range only, presently known as the Aravallis, and Govardhana Parvata is one of the peaks of this range. The Aravallis are perhaps the world's oldest mountains having manifested during the pre-Cambrian period more than five hundred million years ago, and it is also a geological fact that the entire mountain range, including Govardhana Parvata, is slowly sinking into the earth and will eventually disappear. Therefore, it can be seen that modern science only confirms the statements found in the ancient Vedic literatures that Govardhana Hill is slowly sinking into the earth due to the curse of Pulastya Muni.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Pichalina-shila, but continue along the main road to Pahari for another 100mt and the cave is situated on a hill to the right (see map no. 18 & 18A)

BM.43 **BALARAMA CHARANA-CHINHA**

This is where one can see the lotus footprint of Lord Balarama impressed upon a rock. When Krishna was fighting the demon Vyomasura, the earth started shaking so violently that Lord Balarama had to press His foot down very hard on the ground to steady it. The word *'charana'* means 'lotus feet' and *'chinha'* means 'indented'.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Vyomasura's Cave and Balarama Charana-chinha is on the opposite side of the road from the cave (See map no. 18 & 18A)

BM.44 **BHOJANA THALI**

This is the site of the famous Bhojana Thali where Shri Krishna enjoyed a great feast with His cowherd boyfriends. The word *'bhojana'* means 'food' or sometimes 'taking food' and the word *'thali'* means a 'plate'. At this spot one can clearly see on the floor the impression of the plates (*thali)* and cups *(katori*) used by Krishna and His friends, when they all sat down together at this place and took their lunch. Nearby is the spot where Balarama spilled His condensed milk or *'ksira'*, which ran down across the floor and created a *kunda* that became known as Ksira Sagar, or the 'ocean of condensed milk'. A white line can be seen that marks the place where Balrama's condensed milk was spilled. One can also see the *bhajana-shila,* which is a rock with a hollow centre that makes a sound like a bell when struck. Some of the cowherd boys were expert in playing tunes on these musical rocks. The word *'bhajana'* means 'singing' or 'playing' musical instruments and *'shila'* means a 'rock'.

Situated nearby on a small hill behind Bhojana Thali is the place where it is said Lord Parashurama, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, once performed austerities. Lord Parashurama was born in the holy Dhama of Vrindavana at the village of Renuka Grama on the bank of the Yamuna near Agravana (Agra), where the *ashrama* of his father Jamadagni Rishi was situated. There were also a number of sacred *kundas* and holy places in the area including; Narasimha-kunda, Prahlada-kunda, Matsya-kunda, Govinda-kunda, Gopala-kunda, Shantanu-kunda, Avantika-kunda, Haridwara-kunda, Gupta-ganga, and Naimisha-tirtha, but practically all of these *kundas* and *tirthas* have now disappeared.

How To Get There: This place is 2km from Kaman on the road to Pahari Town just 100mt past the village of Kalavati, on the opposite side of the road from Vyomashuras Cave (see map no. 18 & 18A)

END OF KAMYAVANA EXTERNAL PARIKRAMA

BM.45 **KANOYARO GRAMA (Kanvara)**

It is mentioned in the *Bhakti-ratnakara* that this is the place where the great sage Kanva Muni had an *ashrama* and where he performed penance. In the *Puranas,* an incident

has been recounted where it is said that Vishvamitra once fell down from his vows and engaged in coitus in the forest with the beautiful heavenly Apsara named Menaka, who had been sent by Indra to break his severe penance. The result was a baby girl who neither Menaka nor Vishvamitra wanted, and who was thus summarily abandoned in the forest. Consequently, out of compassion for the baby girl, Kanva Muni raised her in his *ashrama*. The girl's name was Shakuntala and she grew up to become one of the most beautiful women in the history of the world.

One day, while on a hunting trip, the great king Maharaja Dushmanta of Hastinapura visited the *ashrama* of Kanva Muni and upon seeing the incredible beauty of Shakuntala, immediately fell in love with her and made a proposal of marriage. According to the rites of the '*gandharva-vivaha',* Shakuntala accepted Maharaja Dushmanta as her husband and after spending some time together, the king eventually returned to his kingdom. Within due course of time, Shakuntala gave birth to a son who later became very famous and was known as Bharata Maharaja, who was a partial expansion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. All the rituals of birth were performed by Kanva Muni who gave the child the name Sarvadhaman. As the child grew up he became so strong that he would play with lions the same as other children play with kittens. He would catch a lion and after opening its mouth count how many teeth it had.

When the child reached youth-hood, Shakuntala took him to meet his father Maharaja Dushmanta in his capital city Hastinapura. Because none of the citizens knew about the king's *gandharva-vivaha* marriage to Shakuntala, when Maharaja Dushmanta was informed that his son had arrived at the palace, he did not at first acknowledge the existence of any son. Suddenly, there was an ominous voice from the sky, which proclaimed that this boy was in fact the king's legitimate son, whose name would now be Bharata. Dushmanta then immediately accepted both Bharata and Shakuntala and they remained with him in his palace at Hastinapura.

After the death of the Dushmanta Maharaja, his son Bharata Maharaja ascended the throne and expanded the kingdom across the face of the earth, stretching from the Bay of Bengal to Greece and included all the heavenly *varshas* surrounding Meru Parvata. He became as equally famous as his namesake, Bharata, the son of Lord Rishabha Deva. He also delivered the demigods from the torment of the demons and in recognition they named the tract of land he ruled as Bharatavarsa. (Sometimes it is said that Bharatvarsha was named after Rishabha's son). The word '*varsha'* means 'country' or 'province'. After becoming the Emperor of the world, Bharata Maharaja performed ninety-nine *ashvamedha-yajnas* at all the holy places along the banks of the Ganga. He also performed a great sacrifice to Lord Indra in Vraja on the bank of the Yamuna near present-day Agra. Some say the incident of Bharata's birth occurred in the Shivalik Hills where Kanva Muni also had an *ashrama*.

How To Get There: This place is 5km south of Kamyavana on the minor road to Varsana (see map no. BM 84)

BM.46 **KADAMBA KHANDI**

The word *'khandi'* means a 'forest grove' containing the same variety of trees. Kadamba khandi refers to the grove of sweet smelling *kadamba* trees where Radha and Krishna performed *'rasa-lila'* pastimes with the *gopis*. There is a raised platform here known as a *rasa-mandala* which commemorates the *rasa-lila* pastimes and every year a big festival is held at this spot, where dramatic performances of 'Krishna-*lila'* are enacted in front of large crowds in the month of *Bhadra* (August). Shrila Narayana Bhatta was the first to introduce the tradition of 'Krishna-*lila'* drama that is now a part of the traditional *Vrajavasi* folk-culture. Narayana Bhatta also spent some time living at Kadamba-khandi engaged in *bhajana* and he established the *rasa-mandala* platform here and at other places around Vraja where *rasa-lila* dramas were enacted. One can also see the nearby Ratna-kunda where there is a *kadamba* tree entwined with a *tamala* tree, which *Vrajavasis* believe represents the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: This place is about half-way between Kamyavana and Varsana near the village of Sunera (see map no. BM 84)

BM.47 **SVARNAHARA (Sunhera)**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said**. "Krishna had many pastimes at Svarnahara, which is also known both as Sonar and Sonhera. The happiness enjoyed by Krishna as He used to herd His cows around the mountain is impossible to describe."** The words *'svarna', 'sonar'*, and *'sonhera'*, all refer to gold, or to the fabulous golden necklace that Radharani was once wearing while performing worship of Lord Shiva at this place. The *gopis* often worshiped the demigods like Shiva and Durga simply to get Krishna as their husband. Therefore, because the goal of worshiping the demigods was only to achieve Krishna's pure devotional service, it is not considered to be on the mundane material platform. Another consideration is that the village was so named due to its proximity to the mountain known as Suvarnachala, which means the 'Golden Mountain'. Some say that the *ashta-sakhi gopi* named Champaklata was born in this village, in Chaitanya-*lila* she appeared as Lord Chaitanya's close associate Shivananda Sena.

How To Get There: This village is about 6km south-east of Kamyavana on the road to Varsana (see map no. BM 84)

BM.48 **UNCAGRAMA (Uchagaon)**

This celebrated village is the birthplace of Shrimati Lalita Devi, the most confidential friend and close companion of Shrimati Radharani. It is well known that whenever Radha experiences any kind of heartache or misunderstanding in Her love affair with Shri Krishna, Her friend Lalita was always there to pacify and console Her. Lalita even becomes angry and rebukes Krishna if she feels that He had wronged Radharani or neglected Her in any way.

Lalita Devi is the senior-most amongst the famous *'ashta-sakhis'*, or the eight principle girlfriends of Radha and is also a *'yutheshvara'*, or leader of her own group of young *sakhis*. She also has her own group of *dasis* (serving maids) and *dutis* (messengers), as do all the *ashta-sakhis*. Like Radharani Herself, Lalita is a *'vama-nayaki gopi',* which means a left-hand heroin, and is well known for her somewhat strident and contradictory nature, as well as her red hot temper, but simultaneously she is unparalleled in her unswerving love and devotion towards the 'divine couple'. Before one can approach Radharani, one must first seek the blessings of Lalita Devi, and then only one should approach Radharani and ultimately Shri Krishna. Lalita Devi's most intimate assistant is the celebrated Shri Rupa-manjari, and therefore it is said that before attempting to approach Lalita Devi, one must first get the blessings of Shri Rupa-manjari. In the pastimes of Lord Chaitanya, Shri Rupa-manjari appeared as Shrila Rupa Goswami.

The name of the village is derived from the word *'unca'* meaning 'upward' or 'on top', because at first the village was built on top of the hill known as Atara Parvata, but later moved down to the valley. This village is also known locally as Lalita Grama, or just Lalita. Shrila Narayana Bhatta, an important follower of Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis, not only discovered this village and the famous deity of Dauji that lay buried here, but also spent a major part of his life performing *bhajana* here and his *samadhi* is also located in the village. Unchagrama, which is also known as Lalita or Lalitavana, is mentioned in the *Puranas* as one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama.

How To Get There: This village is on the road from Kaman and 1.5km before Varsana (see map no. 19)

START OF UNCAGRAMA PARIKRAMA

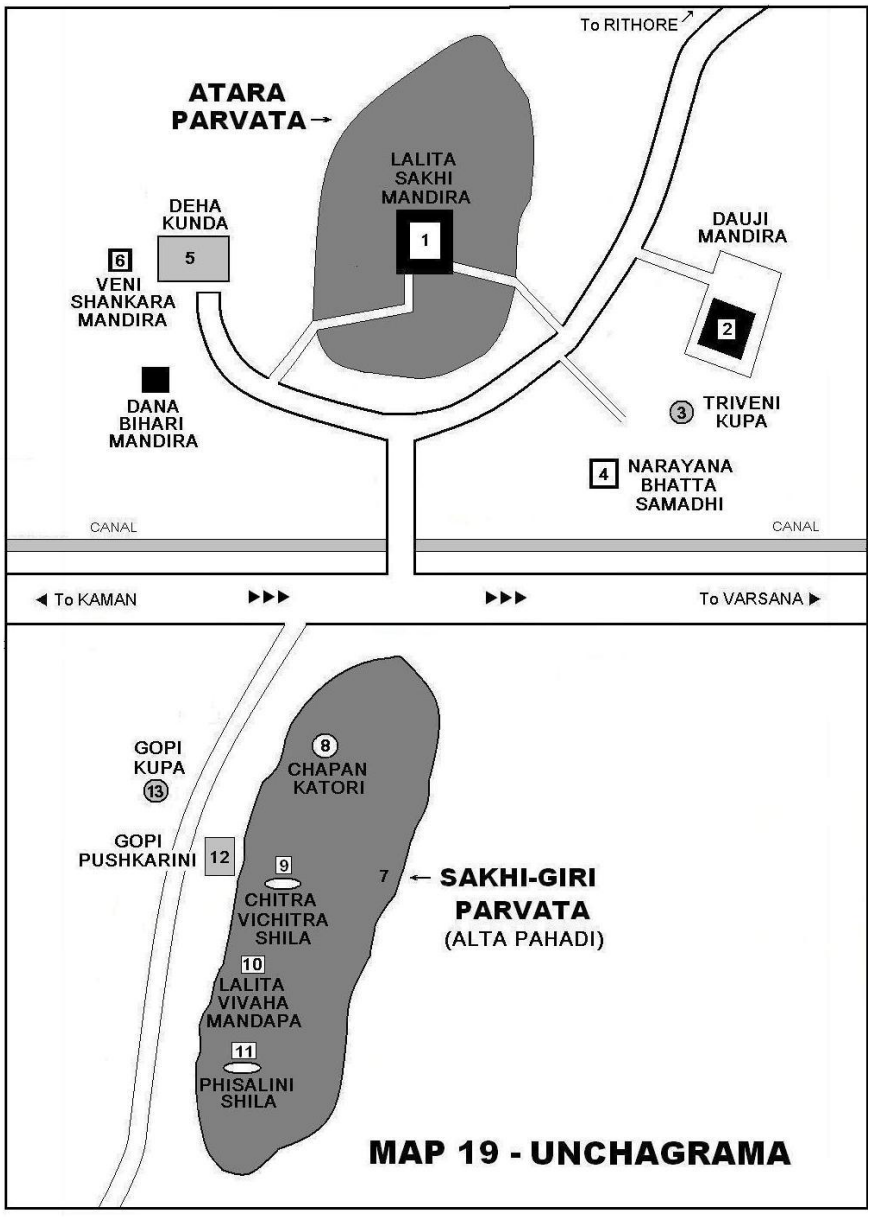
U.1 **Lalita-sakhi Mandira (Atora Parvata)**

On top of the hill called Atora Parvata, is a temple dedicated to Shrimati Lalita Devi. This is the actual site of her birth and where she performed her childhood pastimes. The word *'atora'* refers to the 'balcony' *(atari*) that formed part of the old ruins of Lalita's paternal home. Some people refer to this place as Lalita-sthali. One can see in this temple alongside the deities of Radha and Krishna, the deity of Lalita-sakhi, who is seen standing in a serving mood at the right hand of the Krishna.

How To Get There: This temple is in the village of Unchagrama on top of the hill. (see map no. 19)

U.2 **Dauji Mandira**

This temple is dedicated to Lord Balarama or Dauji, Krishna's elder brother, who is said to have performed pastimes and played childhood games with His cowherd boyfriends at this place. It said that this very large deity of Lord Dauji was originally installed here by King Vajranabha but in the course of time was lost. The deity was rediscovered buried in the ground by Shrila Narayana Bhatta and with the financial help of Raja Todarmal, Emperor



Akbar's Finance Minister, a temple was built and the ancient deity of Dauji was re-installed at this place. Narayana Bhatta spent the rest of his life engaged in the *'seva-puja'* of Lord Dauji, for whom Narayana Bhatta had a special attraction.

How To Get There: Dauji Mandira is situated a short distance from the Lalita Sakhi Mandira (see map no. 19)

U.3 **Triveni Kupa**

The word *'triveni'* refers to the 'three sacred rivers' the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati, that meet each other at Prayag (Allahabad). The word *'kupa'* means a 'well' and anyone who bathes in this sacred well, achieves exactly the same benefit as if bathing in the Triveni Sangama at the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati at Prayag. It is believed that this ancient well was created by Shri Krishna on the occasion of the *Magh-mela*, by pushing His flute into the ground. This was in order to please the *gopis* who desired to take a holy bath at Prayag during the month of *Magh*, and thus Krishna manifested the Triveni Sangama here at Unchagram for their benefit. It is said that Shrimati Lalita Devi used to take bath here regularly. It is further said that Lord Balarama also bathed here whenever He was performing pastimes with the cowherd boys at Unchagrama.

How To Get There: This well is between the Dauji Mandira and Narayana Bhatta's *Samadhi* (see map no. 19)

U.4 **Shrila Narayana Bhatta Samadhi**

This is the spot where Shrila Narayana Bhatta performed his *bhajana* and which later became the site of his s*amadhi*. He was the *diksha* disciple of Krishna Dasa Brahmachari, who was a senior disciple of Gadadhara Pandita. Krishna Dasa Brahmachari was appointed as the *pujari* of Lord Madana-mohan by Shrila Sanatana Goswami. From his very birth, Shrila Narayana Bhatta was an empowered devotee of the Lord who dedicated his life to serving the holy land of Vrindavana. His contribution to the mission of Lord Chaitanya and the Six Goswamis, in revealing the holy places of Vrindavana Dhama is very important and he was able to complete all the excavation work left unfinished by Rupa and Sanatana. Simply by meditating on his own deity named Ladlayaji, he was able to discover a number of important deities around Vraja, besides many important *lila-sthanas* where Krishna had performed His pastimes. It is said that in his famous book *Vraja-bhakti-vilasa*, he has mentioned all the holy places formerly established by Vajranabha Maharaja that are mentioned in the *Adi-varaha Purana*. It is believed he entered *samadhi* in the year 1643.

How To Get There: This *samadhi* is situated south of Lalita Sakhi Mandira near the Triveni Kupa (see map no. 19)

U.5 **Deha-kunda**

The word *'deha'* refers to both the material and spiritual 'body' and it is said that the *gopis* surrendered everything including their bodies to Krishna at this place. Another story says that Shri Krishna actually donated Radharani's body at this spot. Once when Krishna came to meet the *gopis* here, a very poor *brahmana* living nearby approached Krishna to ask for *'dana'* (donation) so that he could get his only daughter married. Krishna declared that His only wealth was His beloved Radharani and therefore He would donate Her to the *brahmana*. The poor *brahmana* was dismayed at the thought of receiving another daughter for whom he would have to arrange yet another marriage. At that moment, the *gopis* brought a scale and placed Radharani on one side of it; they then took of their gold bangles, rings, necklaces, and other items of jewelry and loaded it on to the other end of the scale. When Radharani's weight was counterbalanced by all the gold jewelry, the *gopis* immediately handed over all the jewelry to the poor *brahmana* for his daughter's wedding. Thus Krishna donated Radharani's *deha* or 'body weight' in gold to the poor *brahmana*. Because of this pastime of donating Radha's weight in gold, there is a temple nearby known as Dan-Bihari Mandira, the word '*dana'* means 'donation'.

How To Get There: Deha-kunda is 60mt on the left of the steps leading to Lalita Sakhi Mandira (see map no. 19)

U.6 **Venishankara Mahadeva**

It is said that this deity of Lord Shiva was installed here by the *gopis*. The word *'veni'* means a 'stream' or a 'river' and refers to the Triveni Sangama, or the three sacred rivers including the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati, that were manifested by Krishna at Unchagrama in the form of the Triveni Kupa, for the pleasure of the *gopis*.

How To Get There: This temple is next to Deha-kunda (see map no. 19)

U.7 **Sakhigiri Parvata (Alta Pahadi)**

This hill is known as Sakhigiri Parvata because the *sakhis* or friends of Radha including; Lalita, Vishakha, Campaklata, and Chitra, used to play here as children. Later when they grew up, the *sakhis* would enjoy many varieties of pastimes with Krishna on this same hill. This hill is also known as Alta Pahadi because the *sakhis* applied red *'lac'* or *'alta'* to the soles of Radha's lotus feet, as well as on their own feet. The words *'pahadi'* or *'pahari'* means a 'hill' and the word '*parvata*' means a 'mountain', and the name 'Sakhigiri' means the '*Sakhis* Mountain'.

How To Get There: This hill is outside Unchagrama village on the opposite side of the Kaman-Varsana road (see map no. 19)

U.8 **Chapan Katori**

At this spot one can see around fifty six small circular impressions on the rocks that is said to be fifty-six *katoris* or small containers that were used by the *sakhis* when they were either playing or preparing an offering of food here. It is a tradition that in a *'raja-bhoga'* offering, which is the offering of a midday feast to the temple deity, there must be fifty six preparations kept in small *katoris*, and this is called *'chapan-bhoga'*. Some say that these impressions were made by the lotus feet of the gopis as they played on Sakhigiri Parvata.

How To Get There: This place is on top of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

U.9 **Chitra Vichitra Shilakhanda**

On top of the Sakhi Giri Parvata, one can see the famous *'chitra-shila'* or 'painted rock', which in the sunshine reflects a three dimensional kaleidoscope of bright colors that appears as if some abstract artist may have painted it. Many believe it is a painting done by the *gopis,* as Chitra-sakhi was a very accomplished artist, while others say that it is the impression of Radharani's veil. The name Chitra Vichitra Shilakhanda actually means 'a rock with a most unusual pictorial design'. From the geological stand-point, it appears to be crystallization within the rock, thus making it translucent in sunlight which is a very rare and most unusual phenomenon.

How To Get There: This place is on top of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

U.10 **Lalita-vivaha Mandapa**

Here at this spot the *gopis* performed the marriage ceremony between Lalita-sakhi and Shri Krishna. The word *'vivaha'* means 'marriage ceremony' and *'mandapa'* means the sanctified area where such a ceremony takes place. One day Krishna was sitting here talking with the *gopis*, and Lalita just happened to be sitting next to Krishna. In fun, Radharani signaled to Vishakha to tie Lalita's *sari* to Krishna's *dhoti,* as is done in a marriage ceremony. Suddenly all the *gopis* started singing traditional wedding songs and Tungavidya-sakhi began chanting the Vedic wedding mantras. Some of the *gopis* then started to shower flower petals on both Lalita and Shri Krishna. The truth of what was happening slowly dawned on Lalita, and out of embarrassment she stood up to quickly run away to hide herself, but to her great surprise, she discovered that her *sari* was firmly tied to Krishna's *dhoti*. The *gopis* then surrounded the 'newly married' couple and a wonderful celebration took place.

How To Get There: This place is on top of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

U.11 **Phisalni-shila**

This is the stone slide known as Phishalni-shila where the *sakhis* used to enjoy sliding pastimes in their childhood. The word '*phisalni-shila* means 'rock-slide' One can also see the marks of *alta* or red *lac,* left behind from the footsteps of the *sakhis*, as they engaged in their various pastimes. Some locals call this place as Phishalini, as well as Shikalini, which are corrupted forms of Phishalni.

How To Get There: This place is on top of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

U.12 **Gopi Pushkarini**

This lake is the place where the *gopis* used to bathe and also where they enjoyed playing water sports (*jal-krida*). Some people say this place is also known to locals as Badri-ka-okhal, because the *sakhis* collected sweet tasting *badri* fruits, which are also called *ber fruit*, and would grind them into apulp using an *'okhal'* or grinding mortar.

How To Get There: This place is west of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

U.13 **Sakhi Kupa**

This well or *kupa* is said to have been dug by the *gopis* when they became thirsty while waiting for Krishna to arrive at Sakhi Giri Parvata to enjoy transcendental pastimes.

How To Get There: This place is west of Sakhigiri Parvata (see map no. 19)

END OF UNCHAGRAMA PARIKRAMA

BM.49 **VARSANA (Barsana)**

Situated high on a hilltop that overlooks Varsana is the majestically beautiful temple known as the Shriji Mandira. This is one of the most famous temples in Vraja and was built on the spot where Radharani once lived in Her father's palace. The temple is also called the Ladliji as well as Larilylal Mandira. The village of Varsana is the place where Radharani spent the early part of Her youth, prior to Her marriage with Abhimanyu. Although She was originally born at Raval near Gokula, when Krishna's father moved his kingdom from Gokula to Nandagrama due to the fear of demons, his close friend Vrishabhanu Maharaja, Radha's father, also moved his kingdom from Ravala to Varsana. Nanda Maharaja and Vrishabhanu were both kings and rulers of the cowherd men, and both were extremely wealthy because they possessed thousands of cows and maintained large stocks of milk, butter, yogurt, ghee, as well as substantial stocks of grains. They both built opulent and spacious palaces on the summit of hills and each palace was fully equipped with all the necessities and included many luxurious and palatial rooms where their respective families lived.

When Radharani arrived at Varsana she was around five years old and on the verge of entering Her *'kaishori-lila'*. This is the period of her attaining youth-hood where she suddenly finds Herself being deeply attracted by the stunning beauty and lotus like eyes of Shri Krishna, who becomes not only the cynosure of Her eyes, but also the only purpose for which She seems exists. Her arrival at Varsana also marks the start of the celebrated *'gopi-lila'*, and with the help of Her girlfriends the *ashta-sakhis*, She tries to capture Krishna's heart through spontaneous acts of pure unadulterated love and devotion. Every day Radharani wanders through the beautiful verdant forests of Vraja accompanied by Her girlfriends and together they enjoy innumerable transcendental pastimes in the company of Shri Krishna.

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"Here is Vrishabhanupura, also known as Varsana. Close to this mountain is the residence of Vrishabhanu. On this wonderful mountain the Prince of Vraja, Vrajendra-kumar, performs the *dana-lila* unseen by others. Here Radha's proud pique was broken and where Krishna became intoxicated by performing so many wonderful pastimes. Between the two mountains is a narrow path known as Sankara-khora or 'Danagati', and the fun that They had there is completely indescribable. The *dana-lila, mana-lila* and v*ilasa-lila,* all took place on the ridges of these two mountains. Radharani played with Her girlfriends here in Her childhood. In her adolescence she sported here with Her *'sakhis'* and within the *nipa* groves the *'sakhis'* glimpsed the incredible beauty of her full youth-hood".**

Besides being the ancestral home of Radharani, the *Puranas* say that Varsana is also mentioned as being one of the important *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama, where the transcendental pastimes between Radha and Krishna take place. In recent times, Varsana has become internationally famous for the annual 'Spring Festival' known as the *Holi-mela* that is celebrated with great fervor by the local people, who throw large quantities of both colored powder and colored water on each other as part of the festivities. Also known as the 'Festival of Colors', it is celebrated all over India and is one of the country's major religious festivals. Radha and Krishna also played *holi* with Their many *sakhis* and

sakhas at various places around Vraja including Seva Kunja, Shyama Kuti, and Ganthuli Grama. It is believed that this festival has its origins in ancient Indian history, when the boy-saint Prahlada, a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, was saved from death when his demonic father King Hiranyakasipu, ordered Holika his sister, to burn Prahlada alive because of his unswerving faith in Vishnu, however Holika herself was burned to death and Prahlada was saved, and the citizens celebrated the event which was at that time called Holika-*mela*.

How To Get There: Varsana is 1.5km from Unchagrama, and 21km from Govardhana. Varsana is 42km from Vrindavana by first going to Chhatikara and then turn right on the Agra to Delhi road (N.H.2.) and proceed up to Chatta, then turn left on the road to Varsana which is 16km to the west (see map no. 20)

A Description of Radharani's Exquisite Beauty

These descriptions of Radha's transcendental beauty have been adapted from verses found in the *Radha-Krishna-gonaddesha-dipika* by Shrila Rupa Goswami.

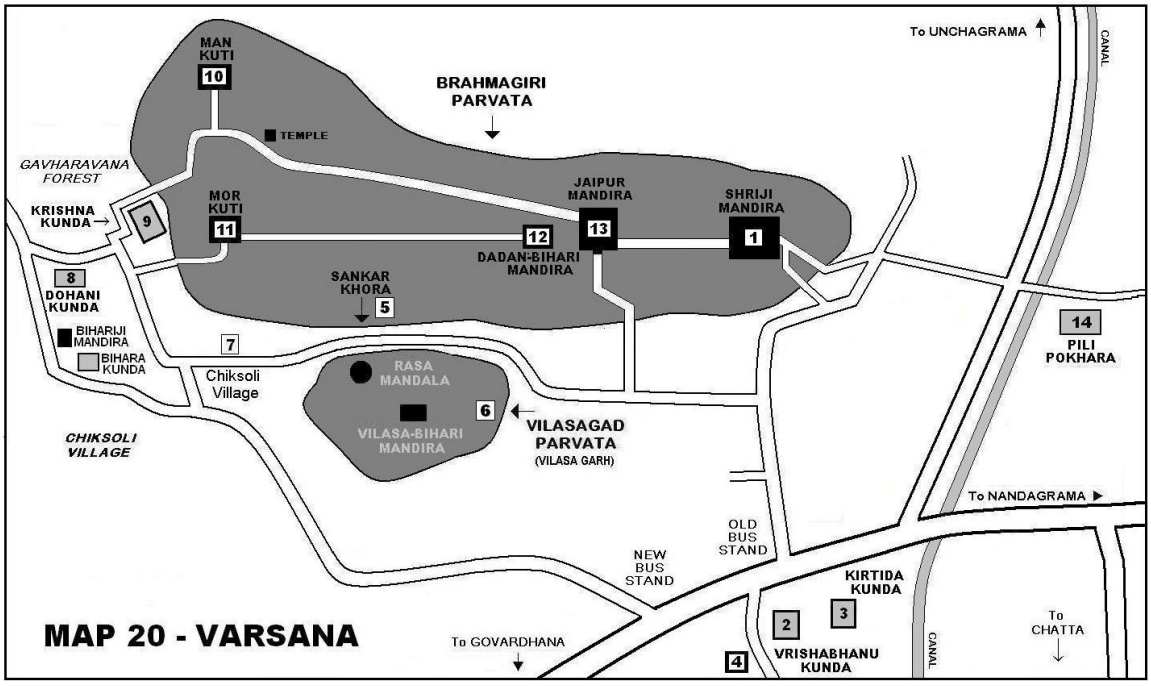
'She wears a radiant blue garment and Her splendid bodily luster appears like molten gold, stationary lightning, or the yellow pigment called *gorocana*. Her face is as splendid and clear as millions of full-moons. Her large lotus-like eyes are lined with black mascara and reach back almost to Her ears, their beauty is incomparable to anything within the three worlds. Her amorous side-long glances can cause even the Lord of creation to tremble and swoon. Her luxuriant black hair reaches down past Her waist and is beautifully braided and decorated with forest flowers, while wisps of curling locks adorn Her enchanting forehead, which bears the sign of great majesty and is anointed with red *kunkum*. Her long bow-shaped brows are capable of firing deadly arrows of amorous desire towards Her beloved. Her exquisitely shaped nose is as beautiful as a sesame flower and decorated with a radiant moon-like pearl. Her nectar-like lips defeat the red lotus flowers in full bloom, while decorated with an enchanting smile of unfathomable love for Her beloved Lord. Her teeth appear like perfect rows of shining white pearls. The beauty of Her delicately sculptured chin defeats even the god of love, leaving him in bewilderment - being decorated with a droplet of musk, Her chin appears as if a baby bee is drinking nectar from a golden lotus flower. Her delicately shaped ears which are perfectly attuned to hear the enchanting song of the transcendental flute are adorned with glittering earrings. Marked with lines of divine beauty, Her slender neck smeared with exotic scent is decorated with a necklace of the finest pearls. Covered with a shimmering bodice, Her perfectly raised breasts resemble water-pots filled with nectar. Her slender waist enchants the heavens and Her naval is as deep as the ocean. Her waist is beautified with three exquisite folds and adorned with a fine jeweled girdle of tinkling bells. Her long slender arms, decorated with gem-encrusted armlets and jeweled bracelets, appear like golden creepers longing to embrace Her beloved Lord. Her exquisitely shaped hands resemble two pink lotus flowers illuminated by a series of shining moons that are Her fingernails, and Her elegantly formed fingers bear many fabulous jeweled rings. Beneath Her radiant blue dress, Her curvaceous hips and plantain-like thighs have completely defeated the god of love, who now lies unconscious on the ground. Her knees are like golden balls perfectly balanced upon finely tapered legs. Her ankles are adorned with golden ankle-bells that caress Her delicately formed lotus-feet and jingle melodiously as She moves. Her exquisitely shaped toes are adorned with golden rings and Her divine lotus-feet, that are decorated with red *javaka*, are the only shelter of pure devotees. Radharani's lotus-like hands are marked with many auspicious signs including; a crescent-moon, lotus, parasol, *stambha*, conch-shell, earring, sacred-tree, flower, bumblebee, *chamara,* and a swastika. Her lotus feet are marked with many auspicious signs including; a conch-shell, a moon, an elephant, elephant-goad, barley-corn, a flag, drum, fish, and swastika'.

START OF VARSANA PARIKRAMA

V.1 Shriji Mandira

This magnificent temple perched high on the hilltop is one of the most famous sites in the whole of Vraja. One has to walk up almost two hundred steps to reach the main gateway of the temple. Appearing more like a medieval palace with its high walls and

elaborately designed *'chatris'* and arches, the temple of Shriji is dedicated to Shrimati Radharani, who is known locally by the pet name 'Shri'. This famous temple is also known as the Larilylal Mandira, because it contains the deities of Larily and Lala, who are the childhood forms of Radha and Krishna. The word *'larily'* means "dearly beloved daughter' and *'lala'* means 'dearly beloved son', which is an affectionate way of addressing young boys and girls in Vraja. The deities were discovered here at Varsana by Shrila Narayana Bhatta, who also built the original temple with the help of Raja Todarmal, his dedicated follower and an important Minister in the government of Emperor Akbar. The temple is actually built on the site of Maharaja Vrishabhanu's palace where Radharani used to live. This temple was at one time also known as the Radha-Ramana Mandira. According to historical records, the temple that is seen today was built by the king of Orchha, Raja Bir Singh in 1675.



The hill on which the temple stands is stated in the *shastras* to be a manifestation of Lord Brahma, who after pleasing Lord Krishna, was given the boon to appear at this place in the form of a hill, so that he could witness the transcendental pastimes that would take place here. Lord Brahma desired to perform some menial service for Radha and Krishna and therefore appeared as a hill on which the 'divine couple' could enact their transcendental pastimes and he could also obtain the dust of Their lotus feet upon his head. It is mentioned in the *Puranas* that Lord Brahma performed penance for sixty thousand years in order to achieve the divine *darshana* of Radha and Krishna. This hill which is known as Brahmagiri, or sometimes as Brahmachala Parvata, has four different peaks representing the four heads of Lord Brahma. There is a second hill situated right next to Brahmagiri known as Vilasgad, Vilasa Parvata, or sometimes as Vishnu Parvata, and is considered to be a manifestation of Lord Vishnu.

How To Get There: This hilltop temple can be reached by climbing over two hundred steps from the village of Varsana to the main entrance of the temple (see map no. 20)

V.2 **Vrishabhanu-kunda**

This is the celebrated *kunda* where Radha's father Vrishabhanu Maharaja used to bathe in the morning. Vrishabhanu-kunda is also known as Bhanukhora and in the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said. **"Look at this Bhanukhora named after Vrishabhanu Maharaja and**

well known everywhere. This whole village is beautified by the beautiful presence of this *kunda*, which is also known as Shrimati Radharani's playground. This *kunda* is surrounded by many temples and bestows *'*Krishna-*bhakti' on all those who simply have its *darshana*."

In his previous life, Vrishabhana had been born as a particle of Shri Hari named Suchandra, who along with his wife Kalavati had engaged in severe penance on the banks of the river Gomati. Being pleased with their devotion, Lord Brahma appeared there and awarded them with a long life in the heavenly planets and also liberation. Lord Brahma also awarded them a special boon that at the end of Dwarapa-*yuga*, they would be born as the mother and father of Shrimati Radharani named Vrishabhanu and Kirtida.

How To Get There: This *kunda* lies east of the Varsana village opposite the main bus stand. (see map no. 20)

V.3 Kirtida-kunda

This *kunda* is situated near to Bhanukora and is the place where Radha's dear mother Kirtida used to bathe. It is said that whoever takes a bath in this *kunda* will be freed from all sins and at death go directly to Goloka.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is next to Vrishabhanu-kunda (see map no. 20)

V.4 Vrajeshwara Mahadeva Mandira

It is believed by locals that this deity of Lord Shiva was installed by Radha's father Vrishabhanu Maharaja. In the recent past some local people decided to move this deity of Shiva from the vicinity of Vrishabhanu-kunda to another location, but the deity was not willing to go. When they tried to move the deity they found that it was too heavy to pick up, no matter how many strong men joined in to lift the deity. After becoming frustrated and bewildered in their attempt to move the deity, they gave up realizing their mistake and prayed to Lord Mahadeva to forgive their offence in attempting to move him to another location.

How To Get There: This temple is near Vrishabhanu-kunda (see map no. 20)

V.5 Sankari Khora

Sankari Khora is a very narrow gorge between the two hills, Brahmagiri Parvata and Vilasa Parvata, where Shri Krishna would regularly stop the *gopis* and demand a tax on the milk products that they were carrying to the market. This pastime is known as *'dana-keli'*, which means the game *(keli)* of tax collection *(dana)*. The word *'sankari'* means 'narrow' and *'khora'* means 'sacred place', and it was the ideal spot to stop the *gopis* and demand a tax before letting them through the narrow pass. On some occasions, if the *gopis* refused to pay any tax, Krishna and His friends would forcibly break the *gopis* pots and distribute all the milk, yoghurt, and other dairy products between themselves. On some occasions, as a reprisal, the *gopis* would gang up on the cowherd boys and sometimes tie them up to trees and give them a good slapping. Once the *gopis* caught Krishna and forcibly dressed Him up as a *gopi* with a *'gagra* and *choli'* (a girl's skirt and blouse), along with bangles and a nice veil, and after balancing a large yogurt pot on His head, the *gopis* broke it by throwing stones, causing Krishna to get drenched from head to foot in yogurt.

How To Get There: This place is 1km south of Shriji Mandira (see map no. 20)

V.6 Vilasa Garh

This pastime place known as of Vilasa Garh is situated on top of the hill known as Vishnu Parvata which is considered to be a manifestation of Lord Vishnu. The word *'vilasa'* means 'absorbed in pastimes', and *'garh'* means a 'secluded place', or in some cases a 'private room'. There is a temple here called Vilasa-bihari Mandira and also a *rasa-mandala* commemorating the *rasa-lila* pastimes that took place on this sacred hill.

In one of the first transcendental pastimes that took place here, Radharani and her girlfriends were playing in a grove on the hill when Krishna arrived on the spot and became absorbed in looking at the beauty of Radharani. This was the period when Krishna was just entering youth-hood and began noticing Radharani's exquisite features. Seeing Krishna

standing there looking at Her, Radharani forbade Him to come any nearer and insisted He should instead go away and play with His friends. Nevertheless, He refused to leave and very gradually inched closer. Suddenly a terrible dust storm started to blow and thick dust clouds swirled everywhere, forcing the *gopis* to close their eyes. Taking advantage of the situation, Krishna sneaked up to Radharani and kissed Her on Her lotus face and then ran away.

How To Get There: This place is next to Sankari Khora on top of the hill to the east (see map no. 20)

V.7 Chitrashali (Ciksauli)

This is the village where the *gopi* named Chitra was born and where she also grew up. Previously there was a *kunja* of *tamala* trees here where the *gopis* would arrange secret meetings between Radha and Krishna. Chitra Devi is one of Radharani's most intimate companions who are known as the *'ashta-sakhis'*, or Her eight confidential girlfriends. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"What can be said about this *'tamala-kunja'*. The *sakhis* arranged a meeting between Radha and Krishna here. Previously this village was known as Chitrashali-grama, but is now known as Cikasauli. Shrimati Radharani expertly dressed Herself at this place."** Radha's close friend Chitra-sakhi was an expert in dressing and decorating Radharani with various cosmetics and ornaments, and therefore Radha would regularly come to this place from Her home, so that Chitra could help Her with Her makeup and jewelry before She went to meet Krishna. It is said that Chitra was also expert in many art forms like painting and she could also understand the languages of animals and birds.

How To Get There: This village is 1.5km south of Varsana (see map no. 20)

V.8 Dohani-kunda

This *kunda* is on the outskirts of Ciksauli and it was the place where Vrishabhanu Maharaja kept his *gosala* and where the milking of his the cows took place. The name of the *kunda* is derived from the word *'dohani'* which can mean a 'milk pale' used for milking or the process of 'milking'. Radha and Krishna also enjoyed many wonderful pastimes here on the banks of this *kunda*. It is said that once Krishna was teaching Radharani how to milk a cow here, but as a joke, Krishna squirted milk from the cow's teat directly into Radha's face.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is to the west of Ciksauli village (see map no. 20)

V.9 Krishna-kunda/ Gahvaravana

There is a famous *kunda* in the Gahvaravana forest near the base of the hill just below Mayura Kutira known as Krishna-kunda, or sometimes as Radharani-sarovara. Local *Vrajavasis* also call it by the name Gahvaravana-kunda. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says **"See the dense forest on the side of the mountain; it is justly called as Gahvaravana."** The word *'gahvaravana'* means an 'impenetrable forest' with thick foliage and considered to be a very secretive place. This small forest is situated around the base of Brahmagiri Parvata in between Sankari Khora and Ciksauli Village. This small forest formerly covered the southern portion of Brahmagiri Parvata around Mana Garh and Mayura Kutira.

How To Get There: This place is 300mt after Sankari Khora near Ciksauli village (see map no. 20)

V.10 Mayura Kutira (Mor Kuti)

The word *'mayura'* as well as *'mora'* are both names for a peacock and *'kutira'* or '*Kuti*' means a 'small cottage'. This place has become famous because it was here that Shri Krishna danced just like a peacock. Once when Radharani was experiencing Her *'mana'* or lovers pique, She came here and sat in solitude while sulking. In order to break Her *'mana'* Shri Krishna came to this spot and began expertly dancing just like a peacock. Radharani became so enthralled by Krishna's ecstatic peacock dance; She completely forgot Her *mana* and Krishna was once again able associate with Her.

On another occasion, it is said that Radha and Krishna were sitting at this spot when They were suddenly surrounded by hundreds of peacocks, who, with their exotic plumage in full array, started dancing in an ecstatic mood, due to seeing the combined beauty of the 'divine lovers' sitting together. Radha and Krishna then got up and also began to dance

imitating the wonderful dancing movements of the peacocks. This place is situated within the celebrated forest of Gahvaravana that used to surround the south-eastern side of Brahmagiri Parvata. There is also a *rasa-mandala* here and a small shrine commemorating the peacock dancing pastimes. There is also a grove known as Chitra-kunja that belongs to the *gopi* Chitra-sakhi, who lived in the nearby village of Ciksauli. Within the shrine at Mor Kuti is a famous painting of Krishna dancing as a peacock, which is believed to have been painted by a blind Vaishnava saint, who, while performing *bhajana* at this spot, is said to have received a special *'darshana'* of this pastime. Chitra-sakhi herself was an expert artist and it is thought that she directly inspired the blind saint to paint this wonderful picture

Another wonderful pastime occurred here while Krishna was playing with his boyfriends who complained that they were feeling hungry and wanted to eat some sweets. Krishna then began playing His flute and within a short time many large baskets full of *laddus* could be seen lying here and there within the forest. The boys started eating all the *laddus* and because there were so many *laddus* lying around, the cowherd boys, while shouting "eat more *laddus",* "eat more *laddus",* began throwing the *laddus* at each other in great fun. To celebrate this famous pastime, a festival is held here in the month of August where the large crowds of revelers throw thousands of *laddus* at each other while celebrating this pastime of the cowherd boys.

How To Get There: This place is on top of the hill (see map no. 20)

V.11 **Mana Garh**

The word *'mana'* means a kind of 'anger' or 'jealous pique' experienced by a female lover towards her beloved, and *'garh'* means a secluded room or a private place where one can sit in solitude. This place is situated on top of the Brahmagiri Parvata and is the spot where Shri Krishna, with great difficulty, was able to placate the *'mana'* or jealous anger that was consuming Radharani. One day Radha had arranged to meet Krishna and was waiting for Him to arrive, but due to some reason or other He was very late. While waiting there, Radha's pet parrot suddenly arrived and conveyed the news that Krishna was sitting in a distant grove and was talking with a beautiful *gopi* named Chandravali. Stung to the quick that Chandravali had managed to steal Krishna away from Her, and was now loitering with Him in a secluded grove, Radharani became filled with indignation and in a jealous fit, ran away and hid herself at this spot.

After some time, Krishna arrived and was extremely sorry to see Radha in such a distressed condition. He tried everything to convince Her that He met Chandravali only by chance, and remained with her for sometime because she was feeling distraught, due to not having seen Him for such a long time. Regardless of Krishna's various attempts to pacify Radha, She remained unmoved and hiding Her face, She refused to even talk. Leaving that place in defeat, Krishna met with Vishakha who suggested a better way of pacifying Radharani. Vishakha then dressed Krishna in the garb of a *gopi* and gave Him the name Shyama-sakhi. Wonderfully disguised as a beautiful young *gopi* and holding a *vina,* Shyama-sakhi was then introduced to Radharani by Vishakha as one of their new friends who was able to sing very sweetly. Radharani was very happy to meet the new *gopi* and invited her to sing and play the *vina.*

As she sang a number of enchanting love songs, the sound of Shyama-sakhi's voice enthralled Radha to such a degree, that She felt compelled to hold the new *gopi* in Her arms and embrace her. As Radharani put Her arms around Shyama-sakhi and felt the touch of her body, She immediately realized that it was non-other than Her beloved Krishna, and became so ecstatic at the realization, that Her *mana* completely disappeared. Radharani then remained there with Her beloved Krishna while enjoying transcendental loving exchanges. There is a shrine here called Mana Kutira, dedicated to the *'mana-lila'* pastime that took place at this spot. There is also a *'hindola'* or *'jhula'* which is a large swing where the 'divine couple' enjoyed *'jhulana-lila'* or swing pastimes with *the gopis*. There is also a *rasa-mandala* that commemorates the *rasa*-dance that occurred here at Managada peak. This spot is also situated within the Gahvaravana forest where it is said there was once a lake called Ratnakara-sarovara.

How To Get There: This place is on top of the hill (see map no. 20)

V.12 **Dana Garh (Dan Mal)**

This is another pastime place on top of the Brahmagiri Parvata where Krishna and His friends would try to extract taxes from the *gopis*. There is a temple here dedicated to this pastime of tax collection known as the Dana-bihari Mandira. This spot is also known as the Danagad peak.

How To Get There: This place is on top of the hill to the west of Sankari Khora (see map no. 20)

V.13 **Kushala Bihari Mandira (Jaipura Temple)**

This beautiful temple was built by the Maharaja of Jaipura for the pleasure of Shrimati Radharani at a great expense to the king. The deities here are Radha and Krishna known as Shri Shri Kushala Bihari, along with deities of Gopalaji and Hamsa-Gopala

How To Get There: This temple is on top of the hill (see map no. 20)

V.14 **Piyala-sarovara (Pili Pokhara)**

There is a famous pastime that is connected to this sacred lake. One day Radharani, accompanied by Her friends, went to Nandagrama where She met Krishna's mother Yashoda Mayi. Upon seeing the exquisite beauty and cultured behavior of Radharani, within her heart Yashoda Mayi yearned that Radha should become her daughter-in-law, by getting Her married to her darling son Krishna. Yashoda Mayi was so carried away with the idea, that she mixed some yellow turmeric paste and began applying it to Radharani's hands, as is the custom when the would-be-bride visits the house of her future mother-in-law. After feeling greatly honored by the affection shown by mother Yashoda, Radha left with Her friends for Varsana.

Observing the bright yellow color of Her hands, Radharani began to feel rather embarrassed and began to ponder what the people of Varsana, and especially Her family members might think if She arrived home with the yellow colored hands of a would-be-bride. Therefore, Radharani rushed to the nearby lake known as Piyala-sarovara and diligently began washing off all the yellow or *pili* colored *tumeric* from Her hands. Immediately after Radha had washed Her hands, the water in the lake turned a very bright yellow. Due to this, the lake became celebrated as Pili Pokhara, meaning the 'yellow colored lake'.

This area around this lake is also known as Pilu Khora because Radha and Krishna used to pick *pilu* fruits from the sacred *pilu* trees at this place. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "On the northern side of Banukhora is Piyala-sarovara where Radha and Krishna performed various sports. At this place the 'Divine Couple' along with their associates became happy to see the beauty of the great *jiyala* trees. It was here on the pretext of picking *pilu* fruits that Radha and Krishna enjoyed each other's company, hence it became known to everyone as Pilu Khora."**

How To Get There: This lake is (500mt) north of Shriji Mandira (see map no. 20)

END OF VARSANA PARIKRAMA

BM.50 **PREMA-SAROVARA**

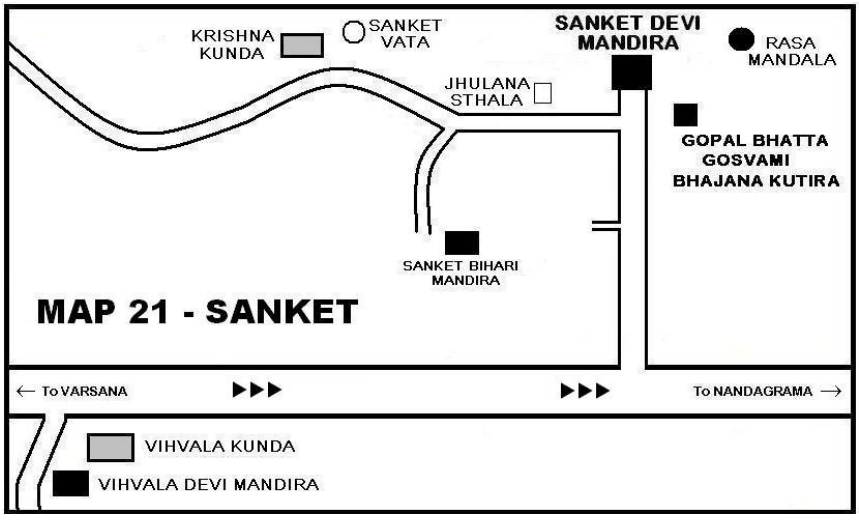
This is one of the most beautiful and famous lakes in Vraja and was created from the tears of Radha and Krishna. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "At this place *'prema-vaichittya-bhava'* was manifested by Radha and Krishna."** The words *'prema-vaichittya'* means 'intense love that brings about sudden grief due to the fear of separation'. One day, Radha and Krishna came to sit in a forest grove at this place and while enjoying loving pastimes together, they both manifested the particular mood known as *prema-vaichittya-bhava*. Radharani was sitting on the lap of Krishna when suddenly a *madhu-makhi* or honey-bee hovered around Radha's ear. This slightly disturbed Radharani and therefore Krishna asked His friend Madhumangala to shoo it away. After chasing the bee and shooing it away, Madhumangala then shouted to Krishna saying, "*Madhu* has gone away" and was referring to

the *madhu-makhi* or honey-bee. Hearing the words of Krishna's friend, Radharani mistakenly took it to mean that 'Madhu' another name of Krishna, 'has gone away'. Suddenly Her mood changed to one of intense grief due to fear of separation from Her beloved Madhu (Krishna), and not being able to see Krishna due to the effect of the *prema-vaichittya-bhava*, She began shedding torrents of tears. Seeing Radharani's mood suddenly change, Krishna's mood also changed due to the intensity and influence of Radha's own *bhava,* and then Krishna, not being able to see Radha anymore, also began shedding torrents of tears. Their combined tears began to create a small lake and They began calling out each other's name in desperation. When some parrots sitting in a nearby tree saw the piteous condition of the 'divine lovers', they began singing the holy names of Radha and Krishna. When Radha and Krishna heard Their names being sung, They returned to external consciousness and were able to see each other once again. Immediately they embraced one-another to Their hearts content. The lake created from the tears of Radha and Krishna became known as Prema-sarovara, which means the 'Lake of Love'. It is said that by bathing in this lake one will achieve divine love for Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: Prema-sarovara is 1.5km north of Varsana and is situated 100mt on the left side of the Varsana-Sanket road, near the small village of Gazipura (see map no. BM 84)

BM.51 **SANKET (Sanket Grama)**

Sanket is mentioned in the *Puranas* to be one of the *adhivanas* or sub-forests of Vraja. In the village one can visit the Sanket Devi Mandira containing the deity of Sanket Devi, an expansion of Yogamaya seen here in her form as Durga, who is also considered non-different from the *gopi* named Vira Devi, one of Vrinda Devi's most important assistants who are responsible for arranging the pastimes at Sanket. This deity of Sanket Devi was discovered here by Shrila Narayana Bhatta, who re-installed the deity said to have been originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja. There is also a *rasa-mandala* commemorating the *rasa-lila* pastimes enacted here by Radha and Krishna, and *jhulana-sthali* where the swing pastimes of the 'divine lovers' took place. Situated near the Sanket Devi Mandira is the *bhajana-kutira* of Gopala Bhatta Goswami, who spent a considerable time staying at Sanket. (Some say the sitting place or *baithaka* of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is located here but this *baithaka* is not mentioned in *Bhakti-ratnakara* and is certainly the *baithaka* of Vallabhacharya, who also called himself Mahaprabhu and established many *baithakas* where he recited *Bhagavatama* which has led to this confusion)



To the south of the Sanket Devi Mandira is Krishna-kunda where many wonderful pastimes took place and also the famous banyan tree known as Sanket Vata. To the east is Vivhala-kunda, where Krishna became overwhelmed (*vivhala*), when He suddenly heard the

name of His beloved Radha being chanted somewhere nearby by a parrot. It is said that this *kunda* was formed from the tears shed by Krishna while overcome by all the symptoms of *mahabhava*. Subala had to immediately bring Radharani there in order to pacify Krishna's intense mood of separation from Her.

Sanket is situated half-way between Varsana and Nandagrama, and was therefore the perfect place for the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna to meet secretly while unseen by others. In fact, this is the actual place where the 'young lovers' first met each other at the start of Their much celebrated 'love affair'. Their first meeting was secretly arranged with the help of Vrinda Devi and Vira Devi, as well as Lalita-sakhi who accompanied Radharani, and Subala-sakha who accompanied Krishna. The word '*sanket'* means 'to give a hint' or 'to give a signal', which is the way the *sakhis* and *sakhas* used to arrange secret meetings between Radha and Krishna at this place. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "In this Sanket-kunja the *sakhis* were giving hints to one-another and very carefully brought Radha and Krishna together here. At an auspicious moment, they briefly became united**

together for the first time at this place. Just see, there is Krishna-kunda and many other enchanting places where innumerable unseen pastimes took place".

Sanket is especially well known because of the midnight meetings between the 'secret lovers' Radha and Krishna. With the help of Their intimate assistants, especially the *gopis* Vrinda Devi and Vira Devi, The 'divine lovers' would come to Sanket Kunja and enjoy various loving pastimes and would later take rest together on a bed of flowers prepared by the *gopis* within the *kunja.* Just before dawn, Vrinda Devi would awaken Radha and Krishna and They would secretly return to their respective homes. During their midnight rendezvous, the 'divine lovers' would sometimes enjoy together on a swing, or partake of drinking honey liquor, or engage in *rasa*-dancing, besides many other transcendental pastimes. Sanket-kunja is also considered to be the residence of Yogamaya Devi, who is the controlling deity and facilitator of all Krishna's pastimes, Purnamasi Devi is her immediate expansion. Purnamasi and Vrinda Devi meet one-another every morning and make all the arrangements for the various pastimes of Radha and Krishna, as well as their secret meetings at Sanket. In the Bhaktivedanta purports to *Chaitanya-charitamrta* it says**. "Yogamaya is the name of the internal potency that makes the Lord forget Himself and become an object of love for His pure devotees in different transcendental mellows. The *yogamaya* potency creates a spiritual sentiment in the minds of the damsels of Vraja by which they think of Krishna as their paramour."**

How To Get There: Sanket is 3.5km north of Varsana on the road to Nandagrama (see map no. 21)

BM.52 **NANDAGRAMA (Nandgoan)**

This is the famous village where Krishna lived with His so-called 'foster parents', Yashoda Mayi and Nanda Maharaja. After leaving Gokula because of the disturbance created by the demons, Nanda Maharaja first stayed at Shakatikara (Chhatikara), and then at Dig, and then at Kamyavana, before finally settling at Nandagrama, where he built a permanent residence. It is said that Krishna was in His sixth year when His foster parents Nanda and Yashoda arrived at Nandagrama and He remained there until He was almost eleven, when He left to reside in Mathura with His actual parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, to whom He was born in the prison cell of Kamsa. In the Bhaktivedanta purports to the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, it is mentioned that Nanda Maharaja left Gokula when Krishna was three years and four months old, having more or less completed His '*kaumara-lila'*. At Shakatikara, Krishna enjoyed His *'pauganda-lila'* and began taking out the calves along with other cowherd boys of the same age. Krishna celebrated His fifth birthday at Shakatikara and after a few more months Nanda Maharaja left Shakatikara and after staying at a few places such as Dig and Kamyavana, and finally settled at Nandagrama when Krishna was six years and eight months old. At Nandagrama, Krishna entered His *purva-raga* and assumed the beauty of a million Cupids which marks the beginning the period of His *'kaisora-lila'*, where He looks after the cows instead of the calves and begins His amorous pastimes with the *gopis*. Then at the age of ten years and seven months Krishna left Nandagrama for Mathura.

Nanda Maharaja, who was the King of the cowherd men, built his palace known as Nanda Bhavana, on top of the hill known as Nandishwara Parvata and the cowherd men built their houses around it. Nandagrama means the village or *'grama'* established by Nanda. The hill on which Nanda Baba's palace was built known as Nandisvara Parvata and is said to be an expansion of Lord Shiva. Nandishwara is the name of Lord Shiva meaning that Shiva is the Lord of Nandi, the famous bull carrier of Lord Shiva. The story of this hill is mentioned in the *Puranas*. Once Lord Shiva, after having undergone penance for a very long time, prayed to Krishna to be allowed the opportunity to witness His transcendental pastimes, by taking the form of a hill in Vrindavana. Lord Shiva was hoping that Krishna and the *gopis* would walk on top of him and he could receive the dust of their lotus feet on his head. Having heard Shiva's request, Krishna agreed to his proposal and told Lord Shiva to appear as a hill in the vicinity of Nandagrama, where in the Dwarapa-*yuga* He would perform His *kaishora-lila* pastimes. Therefore, Lord Shiva manifested himself here as the hill which became known as Nandishwara Parvata.

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Shrinivasa, see the home of Nanda Maharaja called Nandishwara. Disguised as human beings, Krishna and Balarama enjoyed Their pastimes here. See here the boundary of Nanda Maharaja's residence. To the east of Nanda Bhavana is a wonderful garden. Coming from Yavat, Radharani would come here with Her friends."** Nandagrama has a *parikrama* of six kilometers which includes many places of interest. During Krishna's pastimes there were at least fifty six important *kundas* scattered around the sacred village, but in course of time many have now disappeared. It is said that previously the father of Nanda Maharaja, whose name was Parjanya Maharaja, also lived near here at Tagada-tirtha which is not far from Nandishwara Parvata. Unfortunately, due to the violent activities of the Keshi demon, who was at that time terrorizing the entire area, Parjanya was forced to move his residence to Mahavana and eventually established a community of cow herdsmen at Gokula, on the eastern bank of the Yamuna.

Nanda's father Parjanya was the son of King Devamidha of the Bhoja Dynasty, and was born from the king's second wife who was of *gopi* decent; therefore, Parjanya became a g*opa* and was king of the cowherd men. Parjanya's brother Maharaja Surasena was born from the first wife of Devamidha who was of *ksatriya* decent, and so he became a *ksatriya* king and ruled over the province of Surasena and later became the father of Vasudeva, Krishna's birth father. Thus Nanda and Vasudeva were related as cousins, having been born from the two brothers Parjanya and Surasena. The Bhojas were a part of the celebrated Yadava Dynasty descended from Maharaja Yadu, the son of Emperor Yayati.

Nandagrama is mentioned to be one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana. The village of Nandagrama is also considered to be within the boundaries of Vrindavana forest itself, which according to various *Puranas*, encompasses an area stretching from Seva-kunja to Nandagrama and covers the entire western bank of the Yamuna. Therefore in the tenth-canto of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, it is often said that Krishna was returning to Vrindavana in the evening with His cows, even though He was actually returning to Nandagrama. In the *Brihad-gautamiya-tantra* it says. **"The forest of Vrindavana consists of five *yojanas."*** Five *yojanas* is equal to forty miles which is the straight-line distance from Vrindavana to Nandagrama. The *Bhagawata Purana* says. **"Between Nandeshwara and Mahavana is a place named Vrindavana."** The *Skanda Purana* says **"Oh, the abode of Vrindavana where Govardhana Hill is situated."** These verses confirm that Vrindavana covers the area from the border of Mahavana northwards to Nandagrama and also includes Radha-kunda, Govardhana Hill, and Varsana. This particular region is also specifically referred as the heart or inner-core of Vraja, and is also famously known as Nanda's Vraja, and is the region where Krishna spent most of His life and where He performed most of His prominent pastimes. This same area from Seva Kunja to Nandagrama, corresponds exactly to the northern petal of the lotus of Vraja and also includes; Kelanvana, Rama Ghata, Akshaya Vata, Chira Ghata, Nanda Ghata, Vatsavana and Vatsa-krida.

How To Get There: Nandgaon is 48km by road northwest of Vrindavana by first going to Chhatikara, and then turning right going north on the Agra to Delhi road (N.H.2) for30km as far as Kosi Kalan, and then turning left and going west for another 10km to Nandgaon (see map no. 22)

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Visits Nandagrama

When Lord Chaitanya arrived at Nandagrama during His pilgrimage of Vraja Mandala in the year 1515, it was more or less a deserted area with a few scattered hamlets and some old ruins of Nanda's house including the old boundary wall. The Lord took His bath in some of the holy *kundas* scattered around Nandagrama including Pavana-sarovara. After taking bath, Lord Chaitanya ventured on to the hill known as Nandishwara Parvata and enquired from local herdsmen if they knew of any deities somewhere on the hill. The herdsman informed Him that there were some very large deities of a mother and a father along with a child, inside a cave near to the summit. Lord Chaitanya became very happy to hear this and with the help of His assistant Balabhadra and a few of the locals, Lord Chaitanya excavated the cave and found the three deities of Mother Yashoda, Nanda Maharaja, and Krishna. The deity of Krishna was very beautiful and standing in a three-fold bending form known as the *tri-bhanga-rupa* playing on a flute. After paying His obeisances, Lord Chaitanya caressed the deity of Krishna and then began to chant the holy names and dance in ecstasy. The local inhabitants of the area came to see Lord Chaitanya and were surprised to see someone in such an ecstatic mood of love for Krishna. They concluded that Lord Narayana Himself must have appeared in the guise of a human being and was wandering around Vraja in ecstasy. The locals also joined Lord Chaitanya in chanting and dancing in ecstasy. Lord Chaitanya remained at Nandagrama for a few days before continuing His *parikrama* around Vraja.

START OF NANDAGRAMA PARIKRAMA

N.1 Nanda Bhavan / Krishna Balarama Mandira

This was the site of Nanda Maharaja's residence known as Nanda Bhavan where Krishna and Balarama lived; the word *'bhavan'* means a palatial residence. The present temple of Krishna-Balarama has been built on the spot where Nanda's residence once stood. Within this temple one can see the large deities of Yasoda Mayi and Nanda Maharaja with Krishna and Balarama standing in between them. On the right side of Nanda are Krishna's friends Shridama and Madhumangala. On the left of Yashoda one can see Radharani, and then Rohini and Revati, the mother and the consort respectively of Balarama.

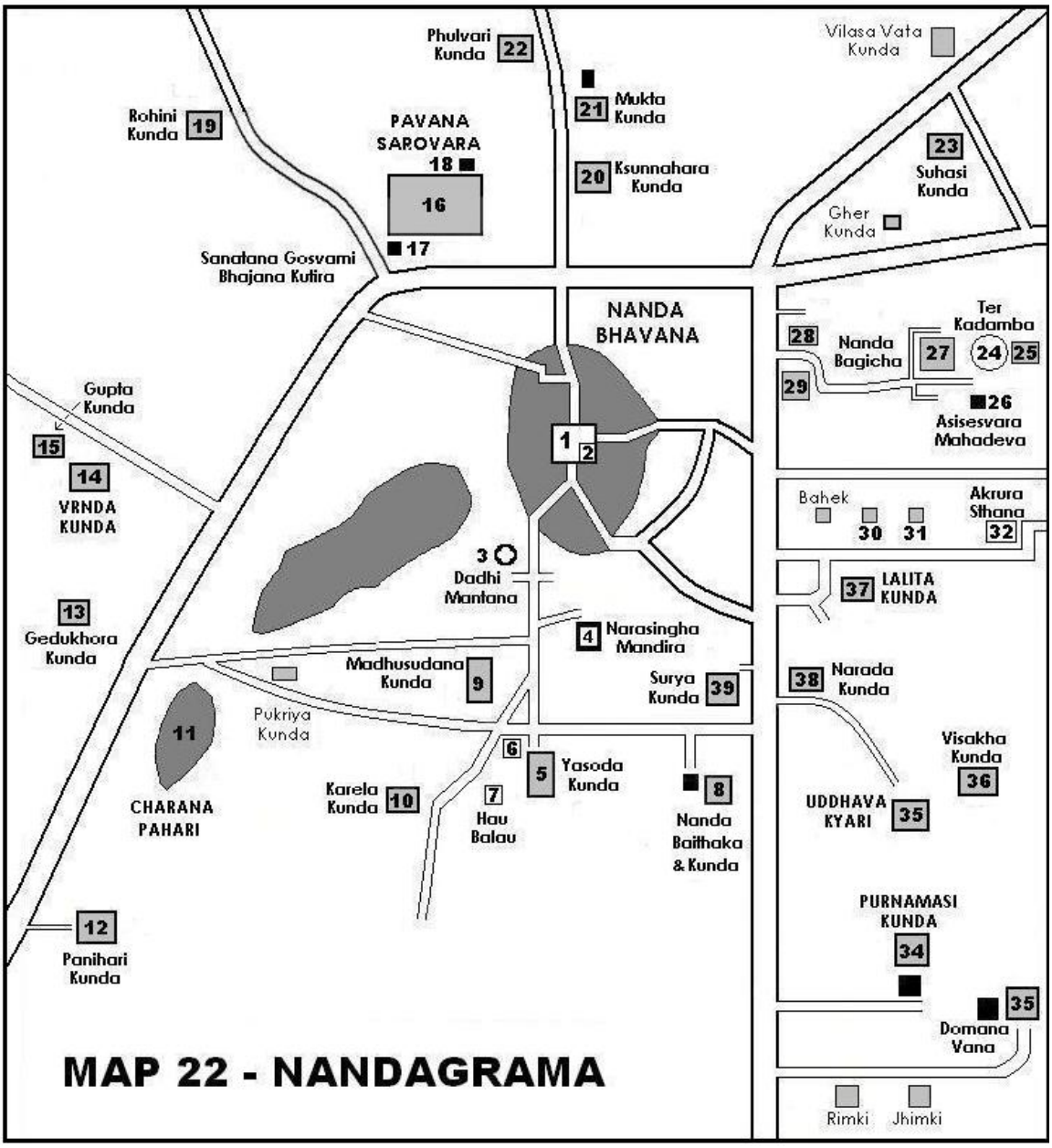
These deities of Nanda, Yashoda and Krishna, are said to be the same deities found by Lord Chaitanya in a cave on Nandishwara Hill. The other deities were added at a later time. After Lord Chaitanya's departure from Vrindavana, He sent the Six Goswamis to the holy Dhama for the purpose of excavating all the lost places of Krishna's pastimes as well as establish temples of Radha-Krishna, write books on the science of devotion, and in general revitalize the cult of Krishna-*bhakti* amongst the population. Within a short time, temples were built at all the important pastime places like Vrindavana, Govardhana, Nandagrama and Varsana. The present Krishna Balarama temple at Nandagrama was reportedly built by the wealthy landowner Rupa Rama Singh of Varsana in the 19th Century.

How To Get There: This place is situated on top of the hill (Nandishvara Parvata) in the centre of Nandagrama village (see map no. 22)

N.2 Nandishwara Mahadeva

In the courtyard of the Krishna Balarama Mandira at Nanda Bhavana is the deity of Lord Shiva known as Nandishwara Mahadeva. This deity in the form of a Shiva-*linga*, is said to have been established by King Vajranabha, and after this deity was rediscovered it was installed in the courtyard of Nanda Bhavana. It is the tradition that the remnants of Krishna Balarama's *prashadam* is first offered to the deity of Nandishwara Mahadeva.

There is a famous story regarding Lord Shiva, which mentions that on a number of occasions when he came to Nanda Bhavana to have *darshana* of Krishna, he was turned away at the door by mother Yashoda because of the way he appeared. Lord Shiva was dressed in animal skins and had thick matted dread-locks, his body was covered in ash and he wore a



garland of shrunken heads and had serpents round his arms and neck. To the mothers Yashoda and Rohini, he looked more like a devil than a holy man, and they thought that he may frighten the children, so they immediately sent him away. Lord Shiva would not protest, but instead sit down somewhere nearby in the mood of lamentation to meditate on Krishna's pastimes.

On one occasion though, after Shiva had been sent away, Krishna started to cry and was completely inconsolable. Thinking it maybe something to do with the holy man that she had just sent away from the door, mother Yashoda had the holy man called back to have *darshana* of Krishna. When Lord Shiva arrived, he touched his head to the lotus feet of Krishna who immediately stopped crying. Mother Yashoda was very happy and asked if she could do any *seva* for the holy man, who replied that he only wanted a little of Krishna's *prasadam*. Therefore, Yashoda Mayi gave him some remnants from the plate of Krishna and

Balarama and in great ecstasy he honored the *prashadam* and went on his way. Therefore, the tradition has been that whatever offerings are made to the deities of Krishna and Balarama, the remnants of Their *maha-prashadam* is first given to the deity of Nandishwara Mahadeva. This deity is sometimes mentioned as being one of five important Shiva-*lingas* of Vraja, and some commentators include this Shiva-*linga* in the list of '*dig-pala'* deities who are the 'protectors' of the holy Dhama.

How To Get There: This Shiva-*linga* is situated within the courtyard of Nanda Bhavana (see map no. 22)

N.3 **Dadhi Manthana (Yogurt Pot)**

Situated on a path behind Nanda Bhavana, is the place where Yashoda Mayi used to churn yogurt during the process of making ghee. This yogurt pot is very large being at least five feet wide and four feet deep. Such types of large churning pots are often operated by as many as four ladies standing around the pot at the same time, each lady with an individual rope for turning the churning rod in unison. This method of churning can still be seen in India even today. The word '*dadhi*' or *'dahi'* means yogurt, and *'manthana'* means 'churning'. Purnamasi used this same pathway at the back of Nanda Bhavana when visiting Yashoda Mayi at this place as well as when going to Nanda Bhavana to have *darshana* of Krishna and Balarama. This path is called the 'Purnamasi-ka-agamana-patha', or 'the arrival path of Purnamasi'. There is also a small temple of Yogamaya here in her deity form of goddess Duga.

How To Get There: This place is behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south (see map no. 22)

N.4 **Narasingha Deva Mandira**

In this temple are the deities of Lord Narasingha, Lord Varaha, and Lord Narayana, and it is believed that these were the deities worshiped by Nanda Maharaja. Nanda was already worshiping the deities of Lord Varaha and Lord Narayana, but on the advice of the family priest Gargamuni, Nanda Baba began worshiping Lord Narasingha Deva in order to protect Krishna from the attack of demons**.** The deity of Lord Narayana is no longer being worshiped due to damage inflicted on it by marauding Mohammedan soldiers.

How To Get There: This place is behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south (see map no. 22)

N.5 **Yashoda-kunda**

This is where Yashoda Mayi used to bathe in the morning and sometimes she would also bring Krishna and Balarama with her and They would play together in the water. On some occasions, the two brothers would sport in the water with their cowherd boyfriends while Yashoda Mayi would sit on the bank of the *kunda* and watch them having fun.

How To Get There: This place is 500mt behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south past Dadhi Manthana. (see map no. 22)

N.6 **Nanda Baba's Goshala**

This is the place where Nanda Maharaja used to keep some of his cows. The word *'goshala'* means a 'dairy farm' where the cows live.

How To Get There: : This place is 500mt behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south past Dadhi Manthana and is near to Yashoda-kunda.(see map no. 22)

N.7 **Hau Bilau**

These stone images represent monsters similar to the fearful Ruru's that roam about in the after-life punishing the sinners. Yashoda Mayi would sometimes try to frighten Krishna and Balarama when They were being naughty, or were not coming to take their meals, by saying that the Hau Balau, with its very sharp teeth, was coming to eat them. The boys would immediately come running to their mother as soon as They heard any mention of the Hau Balau monsters.

How To Get There: : This place is 500mt behind Nanda Bhavanas near Yashoda-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.8 **Nanda-kunda and Nanda Baithaka**

This is the *kunda* where Nanda Maharaja used to take his morning bath. There is a small temple on the bank of the *kunda* containing the deities of Nanda Baba with Krishna and Balarama sitting on his lap. Also found here is the *baithaka* or sitting place of Nanda Maharaja. The word *'baithaka'* means a 'seat' or 'sitting place' and is derived from the word *'baithna'* meaning 'to sit'. After bathing, Nanda would sit here and meet some of his friends. Also, whenever there was a meeting amongst the cowherd men, they would always gather at this *baithaka* to discuss various important matters.

How To Get There: This place is 600mt behind Nanda Bhavana and 100mt from Yashoda-kunda. It is just100mt from the Varsana road (see map no. 22)

N.9 **Madhusudana-kunda**

This *kunda* was famous for the great variety of beautiful flowers that grew here, as well as the large number of honey-bees that would collect nectar from all the flowers. Krishna would enjoy many pastimes at this place with His boyfriends and also took great pleasure in hearing the tumultuous buzzing sound of the bees. The word *'madhu'* or *'madhu-mukhi'*, as well as *'madhusudana'*, means a honey-bee. Madhusudana is also one of Krishna's celebrated names.

How To Get There: This place is 400mt behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south and is just after the Narasingha Mandira on the right before reaching Yashoda-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.10 **Karela-kunda**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Krishna used to come and sit here while observing the beauty of the *kunda* where a large variety of flowers used to grow in great abundance.

How To Get There: This place is 550mt behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south and is to the right of Yashoda-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.11 **Charana Pahari**

This is the place where Krishna's lotus footprints can be seen on a rock and is one of the three celebrated *charana paharis* found in Vraja. The word *'pahari'* or *'pahadi'* means a 'small hill' as well as a 'rock', and *'charana'* means the lotus feet of the Lord. This is not the spot where Akrura saw Krishna's lotus footprints, which is some distance from here at Akrura-sthana near Ter Kadamba.

How To Get There: This place is 1km behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south and is 500mt to the right of Yashoda-kunda and situated on the left of the road to Kaman (see map no. 22)

N.12 **Panihari-kunda**

Yashoda Mayi used to use this *kunda* for providing drinking water to Krishna and Balarama while they were taking Their meals. The word *'pani'* means 'water' and *'hari'* means 'to take away'. This *kunda* is situated in a forest grove and there is a small temple here containing deities of Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: : This place is 1.2km behind Nanda Bhavana on a narrow lane going south and is 700mt to the right of Yashoda-kunda and situated on the road to Kaman.

N.13 **Gedukhora**

This is the place where Krishna and Balarama used to play ball games with Their cowherd boyfriends. The Gedukkora-kunda where They played has now dried up accept sometimes in the rainy season. The name Gedukhora is derived from the word *'gaind'*, pronounced as *gend*, meaning a 'ball'.

How To Get There: This place is opposite from Charana Pahadi. (see map no. 22)

N.14 **Vrinda-kunda**

This famous *kunda* on the outskirts of Nandagrama is the residence of the *gopi* Vrinda Devi, who is very expert in arranging meetings between the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna. Every morning Purnamasi meets Vrinda Devi here at Vrinda-kunda and together they make plans for the days loving encounters between Radha and Krishna. After Purnamasi returns home, Vrinda Devi, within her mind, begins to meditate on decorating the

various forests, groves, and bowers, where Radha and Krishna are going to meet, by arranging varieties of aromatic creepers and vines, beautiful flowering bushes, and blossom bearing trees of various hues around the chosen places. Vrinda Devi, the predominating deity of Vrindavana forest, is non-different from the forest itself including its fauna, and simply by her desire, she is able to manifest a perfect transcendental environment for Radha and Krishna to enjoy Their amorous pastimes. Therefore, the forests of Vrindavana always appear as if spring-time is manifesting there every single day. She is assisted by her friends of whom Vira Devi (Sanket Devi) is the most prominent, as well as her yellow colored pet parrot named Daksha, who acts as a messenger as well as bringer of news.

Vrinda Devi's position is unique because as the predominating deity of Vrindavana forest and an expansion of Yogamaya Devi, by her mercy one can enter into Krishna's transcendental pastimes in Goloka. For this reason she has manifested herself as Tulasi Devi to accept the worship of aspiring devotees and thereby help nurture their creeper of devotion. Therefore, she is also called Bhakti Devi, the goddess who can bestow upon a devotee pure devotional service to Krishna. Vrinda Devi is so dear to Krishna that unless an offering of food has a *tulasi* leaf placed upon it; Krishna does not like to accept it.

At the present time Vrinda-kunda as well as the small temple containing the deity of Vrinda Devi, are now being managed by Iskcon devotees.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 750mt northwest of Nanda Bhavana by first following the road to Kaman for 400mt and then turning right along a narrow lane for another 350mt (see map no. 22)

N.15 **Gupta-kunda**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said. **"This is Gupta-kunda where Krishna and His friends headed by Subala secretly played various games during their wanderings through the forests."** The word *'gupta'* means 'secret' or 'hidden' and this particular *kunda* holds many such 'secrets' as well as 'hidden truths'. The caretaker of this *kunda* is Vira Devi (Sanket Devi), the confidential friend and companion of Vrinda Devi. After she has finished cooking in mother Yashoda's kitchen, Radharani supposedly leaves for Her home in nearby Yavat village, but with the help of Her friend Danishitha, She stealthily makes Her way to Gupta-kunda for a secret rendezvous with Her beloved Krishna, who also sneaks away with some of His friends and also makes His way to Gupta-kunda to meet secretly with His beloved Radha.

Gupta-kunda is very important because in the *aprakata-lila*, it is one of the three locations of the sacred Yoga-pithas of Vrindavana Dhama, where Radha and Krishna sit in audience surrounded by all Their eternal associates, who assemble there in their respective positions around the throne on which Radha and Krishna are sitting. It is rather like when a king and queen hold a royal *durbar* or state assembly, where all the officials connected to the royal entourage are present at the same time. This grand assembly of eternal associates takes place at the Yoga-pitha at Gupta-kunda in the early morning, then at midday at the Yoga-pitha at Radha-kunda, and then in the evening at the Govindaji yoga-*pitha* in Vrindavana. The word 'yoga' means to 'link-up' or 'to meet' and the word *'pitha'* means a 'sacred place', a 'transcendental place', or a 'secret meeting place'. All those personalities who take part in the divine assembly at the Yoga-pitha are all eternally liberated *nitya-siddha* devotees, who possess all the perfections of yoga and are eternally situated in pure unalloyed devotional service to Radha and Krishna, and have descended along with Krishna to take part in His earthly pastimes.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Vrinda-kunda; Gupta-kunda directly behind it (see map no. 22)

N.16 **Pavana-sarovara**

This is the most celebrated lake in Nandagrama and it is customary to first bathe here before going to have *darshana* of Krishna and Balarama at Nanda Bhavana. Lord Chaitanya also bathed here before He climbed the Nandishwara Parvata to search for the deities of Nanda, Yashoda, and Krishna, that lay hidden inside a cave on the hill-top. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Shrinivasa, anyone who bathes in Pavana-sarovara and sees the deities of Krishna, Balarama, Nanda and Yasoda, on Nandishwara Hill attains all**

his desires at that very moment." It appears from this statement that the deities found by Lord Chaitanya were installed in a temple on top of Nandishwara Parvata.

When Krishna returns in the evening with all the cows from the pasturing grounds, He first brings them to Pavana-sarovara so they can drink the cool and refreshing water of this lake. In the *Vraja-vilasa-stava* it says. **"On the pretext of fetching clear water, the lotus eyed *gopis* repeatedly go there to meet with King Nanda's son on the shores of Pavana-sarovara, which is surrounded by many *kadamba* trees accompanied by the pleasant humming sound of intoxicated bees. May that lake known as Pavana-sarovara protect us."**

This lake is one of Krishna's favorite places and He enjoys many wonderful water sports here known as *'jala-krida'* as well as other pastimes with the *sakhas* and *sakhis*. It is also said that after playing in the *Kadamba-kanana* or *kadamba* grove at Pavana-sarovara, Krishna once massaged Balarama's lotus feet as He lay under the shade of a *kadamba* tree. It is also said that Yashoda Mayi would often bathe Krishna here in the morning and Radharani would also come and cook Krishna's breakfast on the banks of the *kunda*. Mother Yashoda always asked Radharani to cook because of the benediction She received from Durvasa Muni, that anyone who ate her cooking would never get sick and would also achieve a long life. Therefore, Yasoda Mayi engaged Radharani in cooking for Krishna every morning along with Balarama's mother Rohini. Radharani also cooked for Krishna at Her own home in Yavata and would send this home-cooked food with Her maidservants to Nanda Bhavana.

The word *'pavana'* means 'purifying' as well as 'merciful', and Pavana-sarovara, due to its supreme sanctity, does all of these things. One day, Nanda Maharaja was planning a pilgrimage to Prayag for bathing in the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati, known as the Triveni Sangama. Not wanting His father to leave Vrindavana, Krishna requested him to go the next day as it would be *akshaya-tritiya*, and an auspicious day for pilgrimage. Waking early the next morning, Nanda came to Pavana-sarovara to take his bath after which he was planning to leave for Prayag. When he reached the lake he saw a very black complexioned stranger of large build taking a ritual bath in Pavana-sarovara. Not having seen the black complexioned stranger at Nandagrama before, Nanda Baba enquired from him his name, to which the stranger replied that his name was Prayag Raja. Still confused about the stranger and not knowing anyone from Nandagrama by that name, Nanda asked him from which place he had come. Prayag Raja explained that he was the king of *'tirthas'* and was from Prayag, which was situated at the confluences of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. He further explained that because all the pilgrims went to Prayag to wash off their sins, he himself was forced to come to Pavana-sarovara to bathe and cleanse himself of all those sins that had been left behind by the pilgrims.

Astonished at what he had just heard, Nanda Baba was completely taken-aback. Prayag Raja then informed Nanda, that because this day was *akshaya-tritiya*, all the holy places of *Barata-varsha* would assemble at Pavana-sarovara to wash of the sins left behind by pilgrims at their respective *tirtha's*. Looking around the banks of Pavana-sarovara, Nanda suddenly noticed so many beautiful looking ladies with blackish complexions coming down to the banks of the lake to take a ritual bath. He then realized that they were the holy rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Gandaki, Gomti, Godavari, Tapti, and Kaveri, who were also accompanied by so many other *tirthas*. Nanda Maharaja was struck with wonder at what he had just seen and heard, and decided there was no value in going to Prayag to take a holy bath, as Prayag Tirtharaja himself was coming to Pavana-sarovara to take his own purifying bath. Nanda Maharaja very humbly returned to his palace full of praise for Pavana-sarovara. Although Pavana-sarovara eternally exists in Goloka Vrindavana, some say that after this incident the *sarovara* received the name 'Pavana' or purifying, while others say that because Vishakha-sakhi's father Pavana Gopa enlarged the *sarovara* so that large herds of cows could drink water there, it was named after him.

How To Get There: This place is 200mt north of Nanda Bhavan where the road to Kaman begins (see map no. 22)

N.17 **Pavana-bihari Mandira**

This temple on the northern banks of Pavana-sarovara is the place where Radha and Her *sakhis* would sport in the cooling waters of the sacred *sarovara* and where it is said Radha's father Vrishabhanu Maharaja, constructed a beautiful palace for his beloved daughter. Pavana-sarovara was very dear to Radharani because of its association with Krishna and She performed many delightful pastimes on the banks of the lake. In an intimate poem addressed to Radharani found in the *Sankalpa-kalpadruma* it says, **"For the purpose of taking a cooling bath, You will enter the waters of Pavana-sarovara. At the same time Krishna and His boyfriends will be bathing on the opposite side of the *sarovara*. Unseen by others, Krishna will dive beneath the surface and after swimming across the lake, embrace You underwater, and then return back. Even though Jatila and Kutila will be standing nearby, and Balarama and others will be bathing there, no one will understand."**

Nearby to the Pavana-bihari temple is the *baithaka* of Vallabhacharya who established many *baithakas* around Vraja where he would recite the *Bhagavatam*. Some say Lord Chaitanya's *baithaka* is also here but there is no *shastric* evidence to support such claims and therefore not accepted by Gaudiya scholars. It has become fashionable amongst locals to make such false claims simply to attract gullible pilgrims to give donations.

How To Get There: This temple is on the far side of Pavana-sarovara (see map no. 22)

N.18 **Sanatana Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

Both Rupa and Sanatana spent time performing *bhajana* at Nandagrama. This is the spot on the banks of Pavana-sarovara where Sanatana Goswami sat while chanting *japa* on his beads. According to *Gaura-ganaddesha-dipika,* Sanatana Goswami was an incarnation of Rati-manjari, one of the intimate serving maids of Radharani in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes. He was accepted by all the Gaudiya Vaishnava followers of Lord Chaitanya as their spiritual master and worshiped by everyone including his brother Rupa Goswami. He wrote a large number of books on the science of devotional service of which the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* and *Brihad-bhagavatamrita* are the most well known. The *Vrajavasis* also respected him as their own guru and wherever he traveled in Vraja, he was always enthusiastically welcomed and large crowds would assemble to have his *darshana* and receive his blessings.

When Sanatana Goswami first arrived at Nandagrama, he came here to this secluded spot on the banks of Pavana-sarovara and engaged in penance while chanting the holy name on his beads. He was so much absorbed in ecstatic *bhajana* that he never even thought about eating. After a few days a little cowherd boy suddenly arrived there carrying a pot of fresh cow's milk. He came before Sanatana Goswami and said. "Babaji, I have brought some milk for you." Sanatana was surprised and asked the boy why he had taken so much trouble to bring a pot of milk. The boy replied that he knew Sanatana was not eating properly and therefore brought the milk for him. Sanatana then asked how the little boy knew. The boy replied that some cowherd men who pass by Pavana-sarovara every day had seen him and noticed he was not eating. Because the cowherd men are very busy, they sent me with this milk for you. Sanatana was very happy to receive the milk and thanked the boy by saying. "You are such a nice little boy and have taken so much trouble to bring me this milk." The little boy replied. "No, no, Babaji, it is no trouble at all." The boy then left.

When Sanatana drank the milk it tasted like nectar, suddenly tears flooded his eyes and he began to experience ecstatic symptoms like trembling within his body. Sanatana then realized that it could not have been an ordinary boy who brought the milk, but must have been Krishna Himself. He began to contemplate the fact that Krishna had taken so much trouble to bring him milk because of his severe fasting. He concluded that Krishna was not happy because of such fasting and decided to stop all severe forms of fasting. He instead performed *madhukari,* by begging a little milk or flour from door to door. After this incident, the *Vrajavasis* built Sanatana a *bhajana kutira* at this spot so that he would be safe from the elements, as well as from wild animals. The word *'kutira'* or '*kuti'* refers to a simple hut used by *sadhus* or holy men, and *'bhajana'* means 'to chant' or 'to sing' as a means of meditation and prayer.

Nearby to Sanatana's *kutira* is the *samadhi* of Shrila Prabhupada's dear friend and god-brother Krishna Dasa Babaji, who was a very wonderful *kirtana* singer as well as *mrdanga* player, who spent the last years of his life, engaged in *bhajana* at this place on the banks of Pavana-sarovara.

How To Get There: Sanatana Goswami's *kutira* is on the southern-side of Pavana-sarovara facing the Kaman road (see map no. 22)

N.19 **Rohini-kunda**

This is the *kunda* where Lord Balarama's mother Rohini Devi used to take her bath in the morning. She was an expert cook and helped prepare Krishna and Balarama's meals every day in mother Yashoda's kitchen

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 400mt north of Pavana-sarovara by taking the narrow lane on the left side of the *sarovara* (see map no. 22)

N.20 **Ksunnahara-kunda (Tadaga-tirtha)**

Krishna used to herd His cows here and enjoy water sports in this lake with His boyfriends. This area near Nandishwara Parvata is known as Tagada-tirtha and is the place where Nanda Baba's father, Parjanya Maharaja is said to have formerly lived. The Ksunnahara-kunda is the place where Parjanya performed austerities and underwent fasting in order to beget a worthy son. Shrila Narada Muni appeared there to bless Parjanya and initiated him into chanting the Lakshmi-Narayana mantra so he could achieve his desire for good progeny. He was bathing three times daily, chanting the mantra and fasting by going without food and water. One day he heard a great voice reverberate in the sky saying. "O Parjanya, you will beget five highly qualified sons, from your third son whose name will be Nanda, the Supreme Lord Himself will appear and perform innumerable pastimes, while simultaneously relieving the burden of the world by killing all the demons." Parjanya later moved his residence to Gokula and in due course of time Parjanja Maharaja, through his wife Variyasi, begot five wonderful sons of whom Nanda was the most brilliant, and who would later raise the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Shri Krishna as his own son. The other sons of Parjanya were; Upananda, Abhinanda, Sananda, and Nandana. The word *'ksunnahara'* means to 'give up eating and drinking' which Parjanya did while performing penance at this place in order to achieve the mercy of the Lord.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 250mt northward down the road to Gedukhor village (see map no. 22)

N.21 **Mukta-kunda (Moti-kunda)**

This *kunda* is mentioned in the *Bhakti-ratnakara* as being the place where the *gopis* would decorate Radharani with ornaments made from pearls. Even today, women everywhere are extremely attracted by pearls and it is a tradition in many countries that every women should posses at least one pearl necklace. The word *'mukta'* as well as *'moti'* means 'pearls' and the *Bhakti-ratnakara* also says that Krishna planted a pearl garden next to this *kunda*. There are a number of pearl pastimes and one of the most famous of these pearl pastimes occurred at Malyahari-kunda and is mentioned by Shrila Raghunatha Dasa Goswami in his book *Mukta-carita*,

There is another story however mentioned in the *Garga Samita*, regarding Krishna having planted pearls in a garden near this *kunda* at Nandagrama, which is sometimes referred to by the name Mukta-sarovara. After Krishna had lifted Govardhana Hill with only one hand, a small group of herdsmen from Varsana became disturbed by this incredible show of strength by a mere child and actually became fearful, being unsure of Krishna's real identity. They had also been disturbed by rumors of a secret relationship going on between this unusual boy, the lifter of Govardhana Hill, and Radha the daughter of their king, Maharaja Vrishabhanu.

In order to convince these bewildered cowherd men that Krishna was in fact the Supreme Lord and the eternal consort of Radharani; King Vrishabhanu devised a plan whereby Krishna would have to perform some miracle and prove His divinity to these men. As everyone knew, King Vrishabhanu was far wealthier than Nanda Maharaja due to having

Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune (Shri Radha) residing in his house. Vrishabhanu decided to send such a valuable gift to Nanda Maharaja, that he would be unable to send such a gift of equal value in return. It is the custom in this part of the world that if one has a daughter of marriageable age; one may send a gift to the family of a suitable boy as a show of affection, which also sends a signal the boy's family that their son had been chosen as the prime candidate for their daughter's hand. In response, the boy's family must send a gift of equal value to the girl's family as a mark of respect and friendship.

Maharaja Vrishabhanu sent a large number of his servants carrying caskets full of expensive pearl necklaces and each of the pearls were very large and of a very high caliber. The servants also conveyed the news regarding the proposal of marriage. Nanda and Yashoda were overwhelmed and exceedingly happy to see the very valuable gift of pearls and to hear about the marriage proposal sent by Vishabhanu and his wife. After the servants had returned to Varsana, Nanda Maharaja put the caskets containing the pearls within the inner chambers of his palace where he kept his treasury. While looking around his treasury, he could not see anything of equal value to send as a return gift to Vrishabhanu and his wife, as the local custom demanded. Sometime later, Krishna, unseen by anyone, also entered the inner chambers of the palace and seeing the caskets, picked up around one hundred of the valuable pearl necklaces and headed for the fields. Krishna removed each of the pearls from the necklaces and very carefully planted them in the ground and then returned home. Krishna was an expert pearl grower as had been proven previously, and He diligently watered the pearls every day with pure cow's milk.

After some days, Nanda Maharaja opened the caskets containing the pearls to admire them, but got a sudden shock when he saw about one hundred pearl necklaces were missing. Thinking that a servant or relative from within his own palace may have stolen the valuable pearls, he felt very upset. But before accusing anyone, he first decided to check whether Krishna or Balarama might have taken the pearls to play with, and therefore went to ask Them. When he found the two brothers, he enquired about the pearls and to his surprise discovered that Krishna, who thought that they were all seeds, had planted them in a garden nearby. Nanda Baba mildly scolded Krishna and asked him to show exactly where the pearls had been buried.

Krishna took Nanda Maharaja to a garden near Mukta-kunda where He had planted the pearls. Nanda Baba got the shock of his life when he saw a thousand pearl trees, their branches bending under the weight of all the pearls that were growing there like bunches of grapes on a vine. On inspecting the crop more closely, he saw that these pearls were far bigger and of far greater value than the ones sent by Vrishabhanu. Each and every pearl shone as if the moon itself was shining from within it. He felt somewhat overjoyed at the prospect of being able to send a large quantity of these superior quality pearls as a return gift to Vrishabhanu Maharaja. When the pearl crop was harvested, Nanda Maharaja loaded six or seven bullock carts full to the brim with the most precious pearls that anyone had ever seen, and sent them to Varsana as a gift to Vrishabhanu and his wife Kirtida.

When the bullock carts full to the brim with the high grade pearls arrived at Varsana, everyone became struck with wonder at the great and unprecedented opulence of Nanda Maharaja. Vrishabhanu was more pleased than anyone else, because it signified Nanda's acceptance of the marriage proposal and was also a fitting reply to those who doubted the divinity of Krishna. After having seen the proof for themselves, in the form of this colossal bounty of extraordinary high quality pearls, the doubters became pacified. Even though the marriage of Radha and Krishna had been formalized by their parents, on the advice of the family priest Gargamuni and also Purnamasi, this arrangement was cancelled and Radha was instead married to a dull-headed retard from Yavata Village named Abhimanyu.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 300mt northward down the Gedukhor village road on the right of Pavana-sarovara and behind Ksunnahara-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.22 **Phulwali-kunda**

It is said that Radharani and the *gopis* would come to the banks of this *kunda* to pick flowers. The word *'phul'* means 'flowers' and *'wali'*, means a 'flower girl', but can also mean the 'place' from where the *'phul'* has been picked from.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 350mt northward along the Gedukhor village road on the right of Pavana-sarovara 100mt past Mukta-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.23 **Sahasi-kunda (Sarasika Judai-kunda)**

The word *'sahasi'* means to be 'very bold' as well as 'resolute'. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said that the *sakhis* acted very boldly in arranging a secret meeting between Radha and Krishna at this spot where the *sakhis* had hung a rope from a large *banyan* tree and made a swing. The *sakhis* then invited Radha and Krishna to sit on the swing while the *sakhis* took it in turns to push them. This *kunda* is also known as Sarasi-kunda, as well as Sarasika Judai-kunda. The *kunda* received this name because Krishna and Balarama were practically inseparable. They ate together, slept together, played together, and whenever Yashoda Mayi saw Them, They were always together. She therefore likened Them to two *Saras* cranes who spend their entire life together. Unlike most animals, once the *Saras* cranes choose their mates, they never separate and will remain with each other for the rest of their lives. Therefore the words *Sarasika judai* means that just like the *Saras* cranes, Krishna and Balarama are life-long partners (*judai*) and will never separate.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 750mt northeast of Nanda Bhavan on the road to Kokilavana (see map no. 22)

N.24 **Ter Kadamba**

There used to be a large *kadamba-khandi or* forests of *kadamba* trees here during Krishna's pastimes at Nandagrama, but now only a few *kadamba* trees remain. The word *'ter'* or *'tera'* means that Krishna was sitting on the end of a tree branch in one of the *kadamba* trees. After enjoying *go-charana-lila* or cow herding adventures during the day, Krishna would return in the evening with His cows, He would climb one of the *kadamba* trees and while sitting on a tree branch, He would call all the cows to assemble there by playing on His flute. When all the cows had assembled, Krishna would count them on His counting beads (*go-mala*) and then take them to Pavana-sarovara to drink water, and from there the cows would then return to the *goshala*. On another occasion, while sitting in the same *kadamba* tree, Krishna played His flute and called all the *gopis* to assemble at Ter Kadamba to enjoy *rasa-lila* pastimes. There is a *kunda* here known as Ter Kadamba-kunda which is where the *rasa-lila* was performed by Krishna and the *gopis.* There is also a *rasa-mandala* platform established here that commemorate the *rasa-lila* pastimes at Ter Kadamba.

How To Get There: This place is 1.2km directly east of Nanda Bhavan crossing over the Varsana road down an isolated lane that goes towards Yavat village (see map no. 22)

N.25 **Rupa Goswami Bhajana Kutira**

This is the place at Ter Kadamba where Shrila Rupa Goswami performed his *bhajana* and where he wrote a number of his well known books during the period of his stay at Nandagrama. It has been said that when Rupa was writing about the anguished feelings of separation experienced by Radha and Krishna, when apart from each other, it caused the leaves of the *kadamba* trees to dry-up and fall to the ground. But when Rupa started writing about the ecstatic reunion between the 'divine lovers', the leaves on the *kadamba* trees would again start sprouting anew, so powerful were the emotions being generated from the heart of Shrila Rupa Goswami. It is acknowledged that Rupa Goswami was the most important disciple of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and was the one person amongst Mahaprabhu's followers, who did the most to establish the philosophy and teachings behind Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* movement.

As the principle *'anga'* or arm of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Rupa Goswami fulfilled all the tasks delegated to him by the Lord, including the excavation of Vrindavana's holy places, delineation of the principles and practices of *bhakti*-yoga, establishing temples of Radha Krishna, and introducing the regulations governing deity worship. Rupa Goswami

also discovered Govindaji, the presiding deity of Vrindavana Dhama and at the Yoga-pitha in Vrindavana, when Krishna appeared as a cowherd boy and led him to the spot where the deity lay buried. He also discovered Vrinda Devi, the presiding deity of Vrindavana forest, when she appeared to him in a dream and revealed the place where she lay hidden at Brahma-kunda. Rupa Goswami also wrote a large number of important books that establish the science of devotional service, with *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* or 'The Nectar of Devotion', being the most famous amongst his works. In fact, Rupa Goswami's celebrated *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* is a true Vedic classic and the principle guide-book for all Gaudiya Vaishnavas and followers of Lord Chaitanya in the world today, and those who do not follow the principles laid down in the *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, cannot be counted amongst the true followers of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. According to the *Gaura-ganaddesha-dipika,* in Krishna's Vrindavana pastimes, Shrila Rupa Goswami was the incarnation of Rupa-manjari, one of the most intimate serving maids of Radharani and the most confidential assistant to Lalita-sakhi, Radha's closest friend and confidant.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Ter Kadamba and this *kutira* is near the *kunda* (see map no. 22)

N.26 **Ashiseshwara Mahadeva Mandira**

Near to the garden (*bagicha*) of Nanda Maharaja is this temple containing a very beautiful deity of Lord Shiva in his form as 'Ashiseshwara', which means 'the Lord who gives innumerable blessings'. The temple is situated in a very beautiful place surrounded by a grove of trees and known as Ashiseshwaravan, where one can also see the Ashiseshwara-kunda. The word *'ashisa'* means 'to bestow blessings' and *'eshwara'* or *'ishwara'* means 'Lord and Master' or 'protector'. Another name of Shiva is 'Ashutosha', which means he is 'very easily satisfied' and it is well known that he always gives his blessing or *'ashisa'* to anyone who sincerely prays before him.

It is related in the *Puranas* that one day Lord Shiva came and sat down at this place while lamenting that he was unable to see his worshipable Lord, Shri Krishna. Shiva had come many times to see Krishna at both Gokula and Nandagrama, but was always frustrated in his attempts. When Lord Shiva arrived at Nanda Bhavan to get a glimpse of Krishna, mother Yashoda turned him away because of his devilish looking appearance, being covered in ash and with thick matted locks, snakes wrapped round his arms, and a garland of shrunken heads round his neck. Yashoda Mayi thought that such a wild looking tantric-yogi might actually frighten her darling little son. As a last resort, Mahadeva sat down at this place and resolved not to move until he could obtain the *darshana* of his beloved Krishna. Meanwhile Krishna began to cry and no matter how much Yashoda tried to console Him, He continued to cry. Yashoda Mayi then thought to herself that perhaps she should not have turned the tantric-yogi away. Yashoda Mayi immediately sent the servants to find the tantric-yogi and bring him back. When Shiva arrived to have *darshana*, he touched his head to Krishna's lotus feet and Krishna immediately stopped crying. Yashoda Mayi was very happy and told the yogi that he could come to Nanda Bhavana at anytime to see her darling little boy. Yashoda Mayi also asked the yogi if there was any service she could do for him, but the yogi simply requested a little *prashadam* from Krishna's plate which Yashoda Mayi was very happy to give him.

How To Get There: : This place is 1.2km directly east of Nanda Bhavan crossing over the Varsana road down an isolated lane that heads towards Yavat village. This place is 50mt south of Ter Kadamba (see map no. 22)

N.27 **Nanda Maharaja Bagicha**

This was the garden or *bagicha* maintained by Krishna's father Nanda Maharaja, where he would grow fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Radharani used to pass through this garden every morning on Her way from her mother-in-laws house in Yavat, to Krishna's house at Nandagrama where She would cook Krishna's breakfast. Nearby to this garden is Chandra-kunda, as well as Jalvihara-kunda, where Krishna would enjoy water sports with His friends.

How To Get There: : This place is 1km directly east of Nanda Bhavan crossing over the Varsana road down an isolated lane that goes towards Yavat village. This place is located before Ter Kadamba and just next to Chandra-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.28 **Kokeshwara-kunda**

Whenever Lord Shiva arrived at Nandagrama to see Krishna, it is said that he would come to this *kunda* and imitate the sound of a cuckoo bird known as the *kokila* or *koel*, which makes a loud sequence of screeching calls, to inform Krishna of his arrival. There is also a small shrine here dedicated to Kokeshwara Mahadeva.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 100mt directly east of Nanda Bhavan and is situated on the road to Varsana and next to Krishna-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.29 **Krishna-kunda**

Krishna sometimes used a path that passes next to this *kunda* when He was taking His cows out for grazing in the morning. It is said that one day Krishna created this *kunda* by pushing His flute into the ground so that the cows could drink water. Krishna and His friends also used to play water-sports in this *kunda.* It is also said that when Uddhava arrived at Nandagrama, the next morning he came here to take his bath in this *kunda*. After bathing Uddhava noticed the *gopis* in a nearby *kadamba* grove near to Vishakha-kunda and immediately went there to convey the message sent to them by Krishna.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 100mt directly east of Nanda Bhavan and is situated on the road to Varsana and next to Kokeshvara-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.30 **Yogiya-sthana**

There used to be a *kunda* here called Yogiya-kunda which has now become dry. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, the Yogiya-sthana is the place where Uddhava gave instructions on *bhakti*-yoga to the residents of Nandagrama and where he often discussed Krishna's pastimes with them during the ten months that he remained in their association at Nandagrama. Thanks to Uddhava's presence at Nandagrama, the *Vrajavasis* felt relief from the burning fire of Krishna's separation.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 250mt east of Nanda Bhavan and situated on a lane just off the Varsana road which goes towards Akrura-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.31 **Jhagadaki-kunda (chach-kunda)**

Arriving at this *kunda* one day, the *gopis* began to distribute buttermilk to the cowherd boys, who in great excitement started to squabble and fight amongst themselves to see who would be first to drink the buttermilk, as well as who would be the one to drink the most. The name Jhagadaki is derived from the word *'jhagra'* which means 'to fight' or 'to squabble. The word *'chach'* means 'buttermilk'. This *kunda* is presently dry accept during the rainy season.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Yogiya-sthana, this *kunda* is 30mt to the east (see map no. 22)

N.32 **Akrura-sthana**

This is the place where Akrura arrived on his chariot from Mathura and suddenly saw Krishna's lotus footprints in the dust; he immediately got down from his chariot and bowed his head to the ground while offering prayers to the Lord. There used to be a *kunda* here known as Akrura-kunda but it has now disappeared; only a pile of stones next to a solitary tree marks the sacred spot, which is still visited and worshiped by the local *Vrajavasis*. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Shrinivasa, this is the place of Akrura, who was sent by King Kamsa to bring Krishna back to Mathura."** Although Akrura knew that Krishna was the infallible Supreme Personality of Godhead, he felt somewhat anxious in his mind, because he had been ordered by Kamsa to bring Krishna and Balarama to Mathura, where he knew the evil minded Kamsa would almost certainly try to kill Them.

Akrura-sthana is on the road from Mathura to Nandagrama that passes through the village of Khayara. After collecting Krishna and Balarama from Nanda Bhavana, Akrura left Nandagrama by the same road that he had arrived on. Although this place is generally

known as Akrura-sthana, the local *Vrajavasis* call it *'Krura-sthana'* which means the 'cruel place'. This is because they felt that Akrura was very a cruel person because he took Krishna and Balarama away from them, which devastated them and broke their hearts.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 1.5km east of Nanda Bhavanaand is situated on the road that goes to Khayara Village (see map no. 22)

N.33 **Domanavana-kunda**

On the banks of this beautiful *kunda*, within the forest of Domanavana, many secret meetings took place between Radha and Krishna that were made possible by the clever tricks of two *gopis* named Rimki and Jhimki, who both have *kundas* nearby named after them. The name *'domana'* means 'two minds' and *'vana'* means forest, or in other words the forest where the two minds of the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna became united as one. The word *domana* can also mean that the two minds of Rimki and Jimki acted as one in arranging the secret meetings of Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: This place is 2.5km southeast of Nanda Bhavan and 300mt east of Purnamasi-kunda. From Varsana road about 1.5km before Nandagram, one must turn right and proceed 750mt eastwards to reach this *kunda* (see map no. 22)

N.34 **Purnamasi-kunda**

Next to this large *kunda* is the humble residence of Purnamasi Devi, who was the mother of Krishna's *gurukula* teacher Sandipani Muni. Being the widow of a *brahmana,* she lived at Nandagrama as a *tapasvini* and always wore simple saffron cloth. Every *Vrajavasi* respected her and treated her as if she was their guru, and no important activity in Vraja was undertaken without her consultation and blessings. On the advice of her spiritual master, Shrila Narada Muni, after the loss of her husband, she left the *ashrama* of her son Sandipani Muni at Avantipura (Ujjain), and along with her two grandchildren, she came to Vraja to be near her beloved Krishna, whom she loved even more than her own life.

The local *Vrajavasis* became very much attached to Paurnamasi and made her a thatched cottage out of leaves and bamboo where she stayed with her two grandchildren, Sandipani Muni's son and daughter named Madhumangala and Nandamukhi. It is said that Purnamasi was especially close to Yashoda Mayi and would go to Nanda Bhavana every day without fail to have *darshana* of Krishna. It is believed after the marriage of her grandchildren, Purnamasi moved into a cave or *gufa* near the same spot which can still be seen even today. Nandamukhi, who also played an integral role in Krishna's pastimes, had her own residence nearby.

Shrimati Purnamasi Devi is one of the most important personalities in the Vraja pastimes of Radha and Krishna, because, as an expansion of the internal potency called *yogamaya*, all the pastimes enacted by Radha and Krishna fall within her supervisory jurisdiction. She is supported in this task by another expansion of the *yogamaya* potency in the form of Vrinda Devi, and under their control; all the various pastimes are unfolding one after another. Consequently Krishna, who has also placed Himself under the controlling feature of the *yogamaya* potency, can therefore forget His own position as the Supreme Controller, and has nothing to do other than enjoy His transcendental pastimes with the *gopis* in the forests of Vraja.

How To Get There: This place is 2km southeast of Nanda Bhavan. About 1.5km before Nandagrama on the road from Varsana, one must turn right eastwards along a lane and proceed another 500mt to reach this *kunda* (see map no. 22)

N.35 **Uddhava Kyari (Udho-kriya-sthana)**

The word *'kyari'* means a 'garden' that is being systematically cultivated and also regularly watered. This particular garden was situated within the *kunja* or forest grove of *kadamba* trees belonging to Vishakha-sakhi, whose *kunda* is also nearby. When Krishna left Vrindavana, all the residents especially the *gopis*, drowned in an ocean of sorrow due to separation from their beloved Krishna. Therefore, Krishna requested His dear friend Uddhava to take a message to the *gopis* on His behalf. This is the place where Uddhava met the *gopis* and delivered the message sent to them by Krishna. At that time, after receiving

Krishna's message, Shrimati Radharani entered into the state of *'maha-bhava'*, the topmost ecstatic expression of pure love of God. Uddhava was extremely surprised to see the high level of spiritual advancement of Radharani as well as the *gopis,* and therefore desired to take the dust of their lotus feet on his head. To fulfill Uddhava's desire, Krishna allowed him to take birth as grass next to Kusuma-sarovara, so that when the *gopis* came there to pick flowers, they would trample on the grass and in this way Uddhava could receive the dust from their lotus feet on his head. Uddhava Kyari is located in a very isolated spot on the *parikrama* path of Nandagrama where one can also see Uddhava-kunda. This place is also known as Udho-kriya-sthana, which implies that 'Uddhava completed the important task' given to him by Krishna, when he conveyed Krishna's message to the *gopis* of Vraja at this spot.

Uddhava remained in Vrindavana for ten months and wherever he went, he spoke about the wonderful pastimes of Krishna. Due to Uddhava continually describing Krishna's pastimes, it was as if Krishna was still present in Vrindavana. The *Vrajavasis* much appreciated Uddhava being present amongst them and by hearing about their beloved Krishna; they appeared to get back their life. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"Uddhava felt fortunate to see the activities of the *gopis*. He had come to console the cowherd men like Nanda, but felt restless by seeing the wonderful display of the *gopis* loving sentiments. It is said that by seeing this place known as Uddhava Kyari, one will achieve perfection in all his activities."**

How To Get There: This secluded spot is 750mt before Nandagrama village on the road from Varsana where one must turn to the right eastward down a narrow road about 100mt to reach Uddhava Kyari (see map no. 22)

N.36 **Vishakha-kunda**

This *kunda* is mostly dry accept in the monsoon season. This *kunda* is situated within the *kunja* or forest grove of Vishakha Devi and used to be surrounded by many *kadamba* trees. It is sometimes also called Mohana-kunda. Vishakha is one of the celebrated *ashta-sakhis* or eight prominent girlfriends or Radharani and was born on the same day and at exactly the same time as Radharani. Along with her close companion Lalita, she is one of the most intimate confidants of Radharani and is an expert in carrying messages, as well as various diplomatic dealings like consoling hurt feelings. She also knows the art of bribery, and is also ready to quarrel even with her beloved Krishna, in support of her most dear friend Radharani, if she thinks that Krishna has done wrong.

How To Get There: Follow the same directions for Uddhava Kyari but proceed eastward another 50mt. (see map no. 22)

N.37 **Lalita-kunda**

This *kunda* is where Lalita would take her bath in the morning. There is also a *jhulana-sthali* here to commemorate the place where Radha and Krishna would sometimes enjoy Their swing pastimes. This *kunda* is the site of a famous pastime where Shrila Narada Muni had some fun at Radha's expense. This joking mentality of Narada and his 'impish' and sometimes 'boyish' behavior, is for some devotees very hard to comprehend, and is perhaps due to his being related to the celestial singers the Gandharvas.

Krishna new that Narada often visited Radharani and had warned Her about the joking and mischievous nature of Narada, telling Her to be cautious as Narada could create misunderstandings even between father and son, or between husband and wife, simply to enjoy some fun. Radha did not take Krishna's warning very seriously as the *gopis* found Narada to be very friendly and funny. One day, Krishna was waiting for Radharani to arrive at Lalita-kunda next to the *jhulan-sthali* so They could enjoy pastimes together on the swing. Lalita was nearby making a garland of forest flowers for Krishna when Narada arrived there, and seeing that Radha was late, saw a wonderful opportunity to have some fun. Noticing that the length of the garland Lalita was trying to make became either too short or too long, he suggested that Lalita should measure it against Krishna's body to make sure that she got the length exactly right. Lalita then approached Krishna near the swing to measure the length of

the garland. When they were standing there together, Narada informed Krishna about his long cherished desire to see Krishna sit on the swing with Lalita.

Krishna was happy to fulfill Narada's long cherished desire, but Lalita was hesitant, thinking that Radha might arrive at any time, and would be upset to see Lalita sitting on the swing alone with Krishna. However, Krishna told Lalita that there was no harm and she should sit on the swing just to make Narada happy. Therefore, at Krishna's request and just too please Narada, Lalita sat on the swing next to Krishna and Narada very gently began pushing them 'to and fro'. Very soon both Krishna and Lalita became absorbed in talking while enjoying each other's company on the swing. At that moment, Narada quickly went to find Radha and told Her about Lalita sitting on the swing with Krishna. Radha became furious and ran to Lalita-kunda to see for Herself and chastise Lalita. Seeing Radha suddenly arriving there in an angry mood and with Narada nowhere in sight, Krishna immediately understood that Narada was enjoying a funny joke and having fun at Radha's expence. After pacifying Radharani, Krishna told Her about the joke that Narada had played. Narada was hiding somewhere, laughing to himself at Radha's predicament. After hearing Krishna's explanation, Radha's anger subsided and She was also able to see the funny side of the joke. Radha and Krishna then sat on the swing together and engaged in *jhulana-lila* pastimes along with Their friends Lalita and Vishakha and the other *gopis*.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is 600mt southeast of Nanda Bhavan on the road from Varsana. Taking a right turn opposite to Surya-kunda and going east for 50mt. (see map no. 22)

N.38 **Narada-kunda**

This is the *kunda* named after Narada Muni who sometimes visited Nandagrama to witness Krishna's transcendental pastimes. Narada's position is unique, in as much that he also takes part in Krishna's pastimes in Vraja. This is due to the mercy of Vrinda Devi, who gave Narada, who is a life-long *'niashtikya-brahmachari'*, the benediction to achieve the form of a *gopi*. She told him to bathe in Kusuma-sarovara and he immediately received the *gopi-rupa.* He could therefore enter the *rasa-mandala* with the other *gopis* and fulfill his desire to witness the *rasa*-dance between Radha and Krishna.

Shrila Narada Muni is also called Devarishi-Narada, the Rishi amongst the demigods, because he travel throughout the three worlds as well as Vaikuntha, completely unhindered, simply by singing the holy names of the Lord and playing on his *vina*. He travels through the air waves at will, carrying the divine message of Krishna-*bhakti* to both humans and demigods alike. He is the foremost son of Prajapati Brahmaji and also an empowered incarnation of Vishnu appearing as a devotee of the Lord. After Brahma himself, he is the principle *acharya* of the Vedic *sampradaya* and has transmitted the Vedic teachings to a galaxy of famous personalities, including his own renowned disciples like Veda-Vyasadeva, Madhavacharya, and Nimbarka. In Lord Chaitanya's pastimes, Narada appeared as Shrivasa Pandita of the 'Pancha-tattva'. Shrivasa not only organized the first *kirtan* parties, but always took part in the ecstatic *kirtans* led by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself at Sridhama Mayapura in Navadwipa.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is situated southeast of Nanda Bhavan on the road from Varsana, just opposite Surya-kunda (see map no. 22)

N.39 **Surya-kunda**

It is said that while having *darshana* of Krishna at Nandagrama, the sun god Surya became so overwhelmed by ecstatic emotions upon seeing the exquisite beauty of Krishna's transcendental form, he suddenly became momentarily stunned and for some time remained stationary in the sky above Nandagrama.

How To Get There: This *kunda* is situated southeast of Nanda Bhavan on the left of the road from Varsana, just opposite Narada-kunda (see map no. 22)

END OF NANDAGRAMA PARIKRAMA

BM.53 **KHADIRAVANA (Khayara)**

This is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja and it is said in the *Adi-varaha Purana* that whoever visits the sacred forest of Khadiravana will at the time of death go immediately to Vaikuntha. The forest of Kadhiravana has an individual *parikrama* of around seven kilometers. There is not much of the forest remaining today and presently a village called Khayara is situated at the place where the vast forest of *khadira* and *kadamba* trees once stood. It was at this place while herding His calves, that Krishna killed the demon named Bakasura. The word *'baka'* means a 'crane', or more specifically an 'egret'. This demon in the form of a giant-sized crane had been sent by King Kamsa to eliminate Krishna, and when he attacked Krishna and tried to gobble Him up in his huge beak, the cowherd boys began crying. *"Khayo re! Khayo re!"* which means, *"*He will eat Him! He will eat Him!" Thus the village became known as Khayara from the words *'khayo re'*. The actual spot where Bakasura was killed is a little to the west of Khayara at a place called Bakathara.

Situated within the ancient forest of Khadiravana is the beautiful Sangama-kunda where Krishna enjoyed pastimes with the *gopis.* In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said**. "O Shrinivasa, see this place where Krishna and His friends played many games as they tended their cows. See here the most enchanting place called Sangama-kunda where Krishna and the *gopis* happily met together"**. The word *'sangama'* means 'meeting place', and when Krishna was living at Nandagrama, He would sometimes meet Radharani and the *gopis* here on the banks of this *kunda*, which was surrounded by a very beautiful *kadamba* grove where Krishna and the *gopis* enjoyed *rasa-lila* pastimes. Lokanatha Goswami, and his close friend and companion Bhugarbha Goswami, also spent some time performing *bhajana* on the banks of this *kunda*, which is also known as Madhuri-kunda,

How To Get There: This forest is 8km southeast of Nandgoan on the road to Chhata. (see map no. BM 84)

The Killing of Bakasura

The powerful demon and servant of King Kamsa named Bakasura, had been ordered by Kamsa to enter Vrindavana and kill the cowherd boy known as Krishna who Kamsa believed was the eighth son of Devaki. One fine day, Krishna and Balarama, along with all Their cowherd boyfriends, were grazing their calves near the bank of the Yamuna, when the evil Bakasura, who had assumed the form of a giant crane, suddenly arrived on the spot for the purpose of killing Krishna. The demon immediately ran forward and suddenly picked Krishna up in his long beak with the intention of swallowing Him. The cowherd boys all started crying out in fear saying, *"Khayo re! Kayo re!"* which means, "He will eat Him! He will eat Him." The duck demon quickly gobbled Krishna up just like a fish, but as Krishna entered Bakasura's throat, the demon began to experience a terrible burning sensation due to Krishna's shining effulgence and quickly coughed Him back up. Bakasura then tried to pierce Krishna to death with his sharp pointed beak, but Krishna very cleverly caught hold of the demon's beak, and just as a child easily splits a straw of dry grass, Krishna very easily split open the beak of the demon. As blood gushed from his broken and bifurcated mouth, the Bakasura demon died an agonizingly painful death.

BM.54 **YAVAT (Jao)**

The ancient name of the village is derived from the word *'yava'* or *'yavaka'*, which means the bright red pigment, called in English as 'vermilion' or 'red lac'. The word *'vata'* means a 'banyan tree'. In other words, this is the site under the shade of this famous banyana tree, where Krishna would secretly meet His beloved Radha and where He also applied *yavaka* on the soles of Radha's lotus feet. It is also said that the *gopis* also used to decorate Radha's lotus feet with *yavaka* under this same tree. Yavat is also mentioned in the *Puranas* as one of the *adhivanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana where there is a sacred *vata-vriksa* or banyan tree.

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Shrinivasa, see here the enchanting Yao-grama known as Yavat, where many pastimes were performed. This is the residence of Abhimanyu where Radharani enjoyed playing with Her girlfriends. By the influence of Yogamaya, what to speak of touching Radharani Herself, Abhimanyu is not even able**

to touch Her shadow. He remains in the association of the cowherd men while Jatila and Kutila are always engaged in household work. The *gopis* cleverly bring Krishna here and their hearts become filled with joy as they witness the Divine Couple's pastimes."

Yavata is the ancestral village of Abhimanyu, who is the supposed husband of Radharani. After Her marriage, Radharani moved from Varsana to Yavata to live with Abhimanyu and his mother Jatila and sister Kutila. Due to Abhimanyu being dull and retarded, he did not know anything about marital relations and therefore the marriage with Radha was never consummated. Both Jatila and Kutila kept a watchful eye over Radharani due to persistent rumors She was having an affair with Her childhood sweetheart Krishna. Regardless, Krishna regularly visited Yavata and expertly dressing Himself in various costumes and disguises; would enter the house of Abhimanyu and enjoy transcendental pastimes with Radharani and Her girlfriends. Sometimes Krishna would even disguise Himself as Abhimanyu and after entering the house; inform mother Jatila that the cunning debauchee named Krishna was planning to come there disguised as her son. As soon as the real Abhimanyu arrived at his home, he suddenly found himself being abused with foul words, beaten over the head with a stick, and driven away by his own mother, much to the satisfaction of all the *gopis*, who took great pleasure in seeing such amazing and incredible pastimes.

The *gopis* and the cowherd boys would often collaborate together in order to secretly smuggle Krishna into Jatila's house, so they could enjoy to their hearts content the amorous exchanges between Radha and Krishna. Once, mother Yashoda was planning to send a trunk-full of expensive clothing and jewelry as a gift to Radharani. When Yashoda went to call Abhimanyu to carry the trunk to Yavat, seizing the opportunity, Krishna quickly hid inside the trunk along with the clothes and jewelry. Mother Yashoda then helped Abhimanyu place the trunk on his head and he carried it all the way to Yavata. On arriving at Yavata, mother Jatila told Abhimanyu that the trunk contained priceless gifts for the pleasure of Radharani, and told him to place the trunk in Radharani bedroom. When Radha and Her girlfriends went to the bedroom and opened the trunk, they became ecstatic to find their beloved Krishna hiding inside.

Yavat is also the birthplace of the eight principle *manjaris* who are the most intimate young friends of Radharani including; Rupa-manjari, Rati-manjari, Rasa-manjari, Manjulali-manjari, Guna-manjari, Vilasa-manjari, Kasturi-manjari, and Labanga-manjari. These *manjaris* are differentiated from the *sakhis,* as they are all *kaumaris,* or pre-pubescent young girls, and can therefore enter the *nikunja* where Radha and Krishna are engaged in conjugal love and serve Them unhindered, and without being aroused or agitated to enjoy personally with Krishna. This creates an uninhibited atmosphere for the 'divine couple' to fully submerge themselves in one another's love without any distraction. The special feature of the *manjaris* is that they have given up their own chance to enjoy intimate pastimes with Krishna, simply so they can unreservedly serve the lotus feet of Radharani and help Her to fully satisfy Her own desires to satisfy Krishna. Therefore, the *manjaris* are considered to be more spiritually advanced than even the *sakhis*.

Philosophical Considerations Regarding Parakiya-rasa

When Radha's father Vrishabhanu Maharaja, under the guidance of Gargamuni and Purnamasi, married his daughter to Abhimanyu, it marked the beginning of the topmost super-excellent phase of Krishna'a pastimes in Vraja known as the *parakiya-rasa,* which is the pinnacle of all *rasa* and gives Krishna the highest level of transcendental pleasure. This *parakiya-rasa* can only experienced by Krishna and the *gopis* headed by Radharani, whereas the queens at Dwaraka headed by Rukmini, although they also enjoy the super-excellent *madhurya-rasa* or a conjugal relationship with Krishna as His wives, they cannot experience the exalted emotions of *parakiya-bhava*. This is because when lovers marry and live together at home; there are no feelings of separation, and the expectation of meeting one's lover is also lost, being replaced with a feeling of happiness, fulfillment, and complete contentment (*sambhanda*). But, if through unforeseen circumstances, one's lover marries another person,

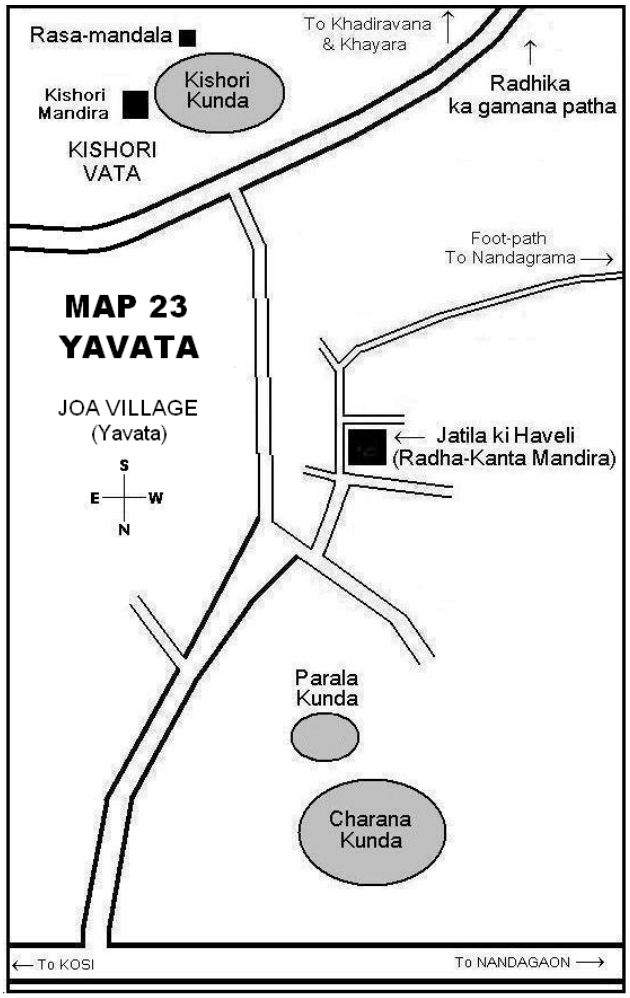
the lovers then experience the *bhava* or mood of separation (*vipralambha*), and meeting together becomes extremely difficult and can only be undertaken in secrecy. This greatly heightens the anticipation of meeting one's lover, as well as the immense pleasure derived from such a meeting, thus adding another level of pleasure to the relationship between lovers, not found in marriage. Therefore, the *parakiya-rasa* of love in separation is superior to all other *rasas* due to the intensity of the emotions experienced by the lovers.

Another important consideration is that all the *nitya-siddha* devotees who descended along with Krishna to assist Him in enjoying transcendental pastimes on earth are all expansions of Krishna's own internal potency, including all the *gopis* and *gopas*. Abhimanyu is therefore also one of Krishna's expansions for the purpose of facilitating the ecstatic pastimes of Radha and Krishna in the *bhava* of *parakiya-rasa*.

How To Get There: Yavat is 3km east of Nandagram (see map no. 23)

J.1 Jatila ki Haveli (Jatila's House)

This is the place on a small hillock where the ancestral home of Jatila was situated and where, after marriage, Radharani lived here along with Abhimanyu, his mother Jatila and his sister Kutila. This place is now a temple where one can see the deities of Radha and Krishna known as Shri Shri Radha-Kanta. In another shrine to the left of the deity room one can see the deities of Jatila, Kutila, and Abhimanyu and on the roof is a place known as the *shringara-sthala* dedicated the Krishna's pastimes of combing Radha's hair and decorating



Her with cosmetics and jewelry. In the courtyard of the temple is a tree which locals call a *moti-per* or pearl tree. It is said that after Krishna had planted pearls in a garden near Moti-kunda at Nandagrama, it was this particular tree that grew there and became covered in pearls instead of fruits.

How To Get There: This place is situated on a hill in the centre of the village and is visible from many miles away (see map no. 23)

Pastime places near Jatila ki Haveli-no longer visible

J.1a **Beriya**

Next to Jatila's house was a *ber* tree where Krishna was once forced to hide the whole night during a failed attempt to meet Radharani. The *ber* tree produces a small sweet yellow colored fruit commonly called *ber* fruit, which is very popular with children all over India. One day, Krishna came to the courtyard of Jatila's house late at night in the hope of meeting Radharani. Sitting on the branch of the *ber* tree, Krishna began signaling to Radha by imitating the sound of a cuckoo. Krishna then came down from the *ber* tree and was stealthily moving towards the door when Jatila, who was only half asleep, on hearing some slight sound, suddenly called out. "Who's there? Who's there?" This sent Krishna quickly scurrying back to the *ber* tree. Each time Krishna tried to sneak past the half asleep Jatila, she would cry out, "Who's there?" and He would have to immediately scurry back and hide in the *ber* tree. This sequence of events went on the whole night and by dawn Krishna was forced to return home without being able to meet Radharani.

J.1b **Vatsakhora (Kidaka)**

The word *'vatsa'* means a 'calf', and '*khora*' means the place. Just behind Jatila's house was where Jatila's *goshala* (dairy) was situated and where Jatila was one day expertly deceived by Krishna's friend Subala. Once feeling very angry at Krishna and being overcome with *mana* or lover's pique, Radharani stayed at home and this caused great distress to Krishna. In order to help Krishna meet with Radharani, Subala came to Yavata on the pretext of searching for his lost calf. Even though the ever-watchful Jatila said she had not seen his lost calf, Subala insisted on searching in Jatila's *goshala*, just in case the calf may have wondered inside along with the other cows. On entering the *goshala*, Subala passed right through to the other side and arrived at Radharani's balcony. After calling Her, he explained about Krishna's great distress and lamentation at Her absence. Feeling very sorry to hear about Krishna's condition, Radharani immediately gave up Her anger and agreed to meet with Him, Subala then gave his own clothing to Radharani so She could disguise Herself as him and thereby sneak out of the house to meet Krishna.

After dressing-up in Subala's clothing and wearing Subal's trademark turban, Radharani made Her way back through the *goshala.* She then picked up a tiny calf and held it in front of Her in order to hide Her breasts, and very stealthily made Her way out of the *goshala* towards where Krishna was waiting. Seeing who she thought was Subala leaving the *goshala*, Jatila asked if he had found his lost calf, Radharani answered in a voice perfectly imitating Subala's, saying that 'he' had certainly found his lost calf and thanked Jatila very much. On arriving at the meeting place, Krishna could not recognize Radharani who was very expertly disguised as Subala, and He immediately began lamenting before Subala the absence of His beloved Radha, thoroughly condemning Himself for having caused Her to become angry with Him and thus stay at home. Unable to tolerate the scene any longer, Radharani immediately came forward and placed Her arms around Krishna's neck and embraced Him to Her heart's content. Suddenly feeling the delicately soft embrace of Radharani and simultaneously smelling the exotic fragrance of Her transcendental body, Krishna immediately knew who it was and became filled with ecstatic love at once again being reunited with His beloved Radharani.

J.1c **Kutila-dushana-sthana**

The word *'dushana'* means to 'criticize' or 'find fault' and this is the place (*sthana*) near Jatila's house where Jatila's daughter Kutila, Abhimanyu's antagonistic sister, tried to find fault with Radharani. One day Kutila suddenly found Radha and Krishna meeting secretly together in a room at this spot and very quickly locked the door from outside and began shouting aloud that she had caught Radharani in a compromising position with Her secret lover. Due to the loud noise created by Kutila, everyone came running including Jatila and Abhimanyu. When everyone had gathered around, Kutila triumphantly unlocked the door, but to everyone's surprise, all they saw was Radharani very peacefully engaged in worshiping a deity of goddess Kali. Everybody suddenly turned on Kutila and condemned her for falsely criticizing and trying to find fault with Radharani. The bewildered Kutila was thus thoroughly exposed and made to look like a great fool. What Kutila and the others didn't know was that Krishna had very expertly disguised Himself as goddess Kali.

J.1d **Padmavati Vivaha Sthali**

This is the place where Radharani and the *gopis*, in order to enjoy some fun, performed the wedding ceremony (*vivaha*) between Krishna and Chandravali's best friend Padma. On a signal from Radharani, the *gopis* began decorating Padma with flowers, *mahendi*, and various other paraphernalia just like a bride. After being decorated in this way, Padma, completely unaware of what was going on, was escorted by the *gopis* and seated next to Krishna on a throne, after tying the corner of her *sari* to Krishna's *dhoti*, the *gopis* began showering flower petals and singing traditional wedding songs, which caused a very great embarrassment to Padma, although internally she was completely ecstatic.

J.1e **Panihari-kunda**

The word *'panihari'* means a place from where 'water is taken' and this is one of the *kundas* where the *gopis* used to come to fetch drinking water.

J.1f **Pivana-kunda**

The word *'pivana'* means 'to drink' and this is the place surrounded by *kadamba* trees where, after being encouraged by the *gopis*, Krishna became intoxicated after He drank the nectar from Radha's lips.

J.1g **Mukta-kunda**

On the banks of this *kunda* the *sakhis* would decorate Radharani with various ornaments made from pearls (*mukta*).

J.1h **Krishna-kunda**

This *kunda* is surrounded by banyana trees and was the site of many wonderful pastimes between Krishna and the *gopis*. This is also the place where Radha and Krishna used to enjoy swing pastimes known as *jhulana-lila*. The word '*jhula'* means a 'swing'.

J.1i **Ladali-kunda**

It is said that Lalita-sakhi would make arrangements for Radha and Krishna to secretly meet each other on the banks of this *kunda*. The word '*ladali'* means a 'young girl' and refers to Radharani.

J.1j **Narada-kunda**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that one who bathes in this *kunda* has all their desires fulfilled. It is sometimes said that this is place where Durvasa Muni gave a special benediction to Radharani, that whatever she cooked would become nectar and whoever ate it would never get sick. Because of this benediction, Yasoda Mayi arranged to have Radharani cook for Krishna every day. It is also said that Radharani would stand here in the morning with Her girlfriends and watch Her beloved Krishna head to the forests for grazing the cows surrounded by His cowherd boyfriends.

Other Places of Interest at Yavata

J.2 Kishori Vata (Yavaka Vata)

This is the place where the famous banyana tree known as Yavaka Vata once stood and which is known locally as Kishori Vata. It was here where Krishna decorated Radharanis lotus-feet with *yavaka* or red lac. There is now a temple here where one can see the deities of Krishna-Kishori. Radharani is known as Kishori and Krishna is known as Kishore, and these names refer to the 'divine lovers' *kaishore-lila*, or period of Their amorous pastimes in youth-hood. Although the famous banyan tree has disappeared one can still see Kishori–kunda and the Rasa-mandala.

How To Get There: (see map no. 23)

J.3 Kishori-kunda

Kishori is another name for Radharani and this *kunda* was one of the places where She enjoyed pastimes with Her *sakhis*. It is said that Krishna would also enjoy water sports or *jal-vihara* pastimes with Radharani and the *gopis* in this *kunda*. Situated on the bank of the *kunda* is the Shri Kishoriji Mandira and nearby is Chira-kunda where *jhulana-lila* or swing pastimes took place

How To Get There: (see map no.xx)

J.4 Rasa-mandala

This *rasa-mandala* platform on the banks of Kishori-kunda was established by Shrila Narayana Bhatta to commemorate the *rasa-lila* pastimes that took place at Yavata between Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: (see map no. 23)

J.5 Parala-kunda (Piyala-kunda)

This *kunda* is also known as Parala-ganga and it is said that the water of the Ganges River appeared here just for the satisfaction of Radharani. There is an ancient *parijata* tree on the bank of this *kunda* which is said to have been planted by Radharani, who made garlands from its flowers which she offered to Krishna. There is still a tree at this same place which is said to flower once in a year in the month of *Vaishakha.*

How To Get There: (see map no. 23)

J.6 Charana-Kunda (Charana-ganga)

It is said that once when Radharani was returning to Yavata from enjoying pastimes with Krishna in the nearby forest of Kokilavana, She suddenly noticed Her feet were covered in mud from the forest. Radharani became anxious that Her mother-in-law Jatila would see the mud on Her feet and understand She had been loitering in Kokilavana with Krishna. At that moment Krishna suddenly manifested the Ganges River at this place by pressing His foot into the ground. Radharani could then wash the mud from Her lotus feet in the newly-formed *kunda* before returning home.

How To Get There: (see map no. 23)

J.7 Radhika-gamana-patha

The word *'gamana-patha'* means the 'pathway used by Radharani' when She went to Surya-kunda each morning to worship the sun god Suryadeva. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"Radha goes on this path to worship Suryadeva and She waits in this forest of *kadamba* trees to catch a glimpse of Her beloved Krishna. As Krishna approaches He catches hold of Her cloth, and in this way They both enjoy great fun".** The daily pastimes of Radharani performing *puja* at the sun god's temple at Surya-kunda, as well as Her pastimes at Radha-kunda, form part of the a*shta-kaliya-lila*, or the eight-fold daily activities of the 'divine lovers' Radha and Krishna.

How To Get There: (see map no. 23)

BM.55 **KOKILAVANA**

This isolated and untouched verdant forest is still much the same as it was even in ancient times and is full of many bird varieties and other wildlife like deer and antelope. The *Puranas* say that Kokilvana is one of the sub-forests or *upavanas* of Vrindavana, although in some *Puranas* it is mentioned to be one of the *dwadashavavas*. Kokilavana is one of the forests where Krishna performed pastimes with Radharani and the *gopis* including the celebrated *rasa*-dance. The forest takes its name from the *'kokila'* bird, which refers to the black colored Indian cuckoo also known as koel. This particular cuckoo has a loud shrieking call; *kuhoo, kuhoo, kuhoo*, repeated in crescendo four or five times during the summer, usually in the early morning and late evening. One day Krishna came to this forest in order to meet Radharani and the *gopis,* but due to the ever-watchful eye of Jatila, Radharani and the *gopis* could not leave the house. Understanding the situation, Krishna began to call the *gopis* by imitating the melodious song of the *kokila* bird, which inspired all the other *kokila* birds in the forest to start singing, thus creating a tumultuous sound that could be heard for miles.

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says. **"To the west of Yavat is a forest where one may hear hundreds of thousands of *kokilas* sing. One day Krishna entered this forest and happily made a sound just like a *kokila* bird. In response, all the birds began singing so loudly that the sound was heard in Yavat. Hearing the sound of the *kokilas*, Jatila told Vishakha that she had never heard such songs from the *kokilas*. Vishakha replied that if Jatila would give them permission, the *gopis* would go to see the *kokilas* in the forest. Jatila then told them to go and listen to the birds and thus Radharani with Her girlfriends entered the forest. In unlimited happiness they came here and thus Radha was able to meet Krishna, who was engaged in making sounds of the *kokila* bird. For this reason this forest is known as Kokilavana."**

In the forest of Kokilavana one can see the *rasa-mandala* platform established by Shrila Narayana Bhatta to commemorate Krishna's *rasa-lila* pastimes in this forest and also Ratna-kunda, where it is said the *gopis* obtained many kinds of precious gemstones which they used in decorating Radharani. The word *'ratna'* means 'gemstones'. There are also two famous temples here; the Radha Kokila-bihari Mandira dedicated to Krishna's pastimes at Kokilavana and the more recent Shanideva Mandira, dedicated to the demigod of the planet Saturn, where large crowds gather on Saturdays, the day on which Hindus worship Shanideva (Saturn).

How To Get There: This forest is on the road from Nandagoan to Kosi and is 1.5km west of Yavat, and 5km north of Nandgoan. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.56 **BADA BAITHANA (Bathain Kalan)**

There are two villages located very close to each another; the first one is called Bathain Kalan, also known as Bada Bathain (Big Bathain). The second village is half a kilometer to the north and called Bathain Kurd, also known as Chota Bathain (Small Bathain). The name of this village is derived from the word *'baithna'* which means 'to sit down'. It is said that one day while herding the cows at this place, Krishna saw the *gopis* in the distance and asked Balarama to sit down (*baithna*) at this place and wait for Him while He went to speak with Radharani. It is also said that Nanda Maharaja and his minister Upananda, would hold some of their important meetings here at the *baithaka* or sitting place within this village. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said **"See this village named Baithana. When the cowherd men had a conference, everyone came to this place and sat. Because they all sat here, this place is known as Baithana."** The *Bhakti-ratnakara* also says that Shrila Sanatana Goswami often came to this village and spent time here performing *bhajana*, much to the satisfaction of the local *Vrajavasis*, who had great affection for Sanatana and held him in high esteem.

In the village one can see the Dauji Mandira and Balabhadra-kunda, which is sometimes called Krishna-kunda, and is the place where the cowherd boys enjoyed water sports with Krishna and Balarama. During the annual *Holi-mela* festivities there is a huge celebration held on the banks of this *kunda* known as the *Holanga-mela*, where the local

version of '*lathimar-holi'* is enacted. This is where the ladies of this village enjoy abusing and then beating the men from Chota Bathain with long bamboo sticks known as *lathis,* while the men try to protect themselves with broken off tree branches. The *Holi-mela* as well as the *lathimra-holi* is celebrated in Varsana, Nandagrama, and a number of other places around Vraja

How To Get There: This place is 3km north of Kokilavana. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.57 **CHOTA BATHAIN (Bathain Kurd)**

Here in this village one can see Kuntala-kunda where Krishna sometimes came with the cowherd boys who used to comb and decorate His hair with forest flowers. The word *'kuntala'* means 'lock of hair'. It is also said that the *sakhis* would also comb Radharani's hair and braid Her locks with forest flowers on the banks of this same *kunda*. In the village one can see a temple of Sakhsi Gopala.

How To Get There: This place is (500mt) north of Bathain Kalan. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.58 **CHARANA PAHADI**

This is the famous place where one can see the impression of Krishna's lotus feet on top of the mountain. There are three such *Charana Pahadis* in Vraja, Kamyavana, Nandagrama, and here near Chota Bathain. The word *'charana'* means Krishna's 'lotus feet' and *'pahadi'* means a hill. One day, Krishna and His cowherd boyfriends were herding cows at this place when they decided to climb to the top of the hill and observe the cows in the pastures below. Once on top of the hill, Krishna took out His flute and standing in His three-fold bending form known as *tri-bhanga-rupa*, began playing such an enchanting melody that it captivated the minds of all those who heard it. Being attracted by the sweet sound of the flute, the cows gradually arrived there along with a number of forest animals including deer and antelopes, and also some local village people also came there. They all stood there completely motionless along with the cowherd boys, listening to the ecstatic sounds of Krishna's flute. Experiencing great ecstasy at the sound of the flute, even the rocks on top of the hill became softened as if they were going to melt. Because the rocks became softened due to the vibrations of the flute, the impressions of the feet of all those who had assembled there became impressed upon the rocks, including those of the cows, the various animals, the cowherd boys, and the local villagers. Therefore, along with Krishna's lotus feet one can also see the various impressions left by the cowherd boys, the cows, the deer and the antelopes birds and many other creatures, as well as the villagers. Nearby is the *kunda* known as Charana-ganga where it is said that Krishna once washed His lotus feet.

How To Get There: This place is 1km north of Baithana Khurd. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.59 **KOTARAVANA (Kotban)**

This forest which is also called Kotvana is one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests mentioned in the *Puranas*. Krishna used to come here while herding the cows and enjoyed many childhood pastimes with His friends in this forest. Nearby is Sitala-kunda and Surya-kunda. Kotaravana is one of the most northernly points on the Vraja Mandala Parikrama route before the *parikrama* turns eastward towards Seshasayi and then south to Paigrama. The name Kotaravana suggests that it was a forest where there were many woodpeckers (*kotaras*).

How To Get There: Kotban is 4km north of Charana Pahadi and 5km north of Kosi. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.60 **SESHASHAYI (Shernagar)**

This is the famous deity of Seshashayi Vishnu that is said to have been originally established by Vajranabha Maharaja, Krishna's great-grandson almost five thousand years ago. This deity of Ksiradakashayi Vishnu is seen lying down on the celestial serpent Sesha Naga and being served by Lakshmi Devi, the goddess of fortune, who is massaging the Lord's lotus feet. The ancient name of this place was Seshashayi and it is also mentioned in the *Puranas* that Seshashayi is one of the *upavanas,* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama. It is

also said that this place was also called Ksirasagara and there is a village nearby called Ksirasagara Grama.

There are a number of versions of Krishna's pastimes here at Seshashayi, but the most widely accepted one is as follows. One day, Krishna met Radharani and the *gopis* in this forest. Nearby, there was a recitation of the Vedic scriptures where Seshashayi Vishnu was being glorified. Hearing the recitation, Radharani had a sudden desire to see this particular pastime and began discussing with the other *gopis* the greatness of Seshashayi Bhagavana, when suddenly Krishna began boasting that He Himself was none-different from Seshashayi Bhagavana. The *gopis*, who were quite accustomed to hearing Krishna's boasting words, started laughing and told Him that He should either prove it or stop His idle boasting.

At that moment Krishna entered the waters of a nearby *kunda* and lay down on a large lotus flower while manifesting the *bhava* or mood of Sesheshayi Vishnu. At that moment in a state of ecstatic love, Radharani also entered the *kunda* and sitting on the same lotus flower began massaging Krishna's lotus feet being overcome with the *bhava* of Laksmi Devi. Just at that moment, Radha had the deep desire to place Krishna's lotus feet on Her raised breasts that were aflame with the fire of spiritual desire, but immediately contained Herself, thinking that Her breasts might be too hard for Krishna's soft lotus feet, even though Her limbs are as soft and delicate as the petals of a lotus. When the *gopis* saw this incredible pastime taking place before their eyes, they were completely amazed and became stunned due to the incessant flow of ecstatic emotions. (In another version of the story it says that Balarama also entered the *kunda* and manifested the form of Seshanaga).

In the *Vraja-riti-chintamani* it says. **"There Lord Krishna manifested the milk ocean and expanded Himself as Ananta Sesha, transformed Himself into Ksiradakashayi Vishnu, and then sat down on the body of Ananta. Shri Radha then became the beautifull Lakshmi Devi, who with humbly bowed head began to massage Lord Vishnu's lotus feet. This sight greatly delighted Radha's onlooking gopi-friends".**

To celebrate this unique pastime, it is said that Vajranabha Maharaja established the deity of Seshashayi Vishnu at this spot next to the Ksirasagara-kunda. This famous *kunda* is also called Ksira Samudra, or Ksira Sagara and both of these names refer to the 'ocean of milk'. The word *'ksira'* pronounced as *shira* means 'milk', and the word *'sagara'* as well as *'samudra'* means 'ocean'. The name Seshashayi refers to the pastime where Lord Vishnu lays down to rest *'shayi'* on Sesha, the serpent expansion of Balarama, whose soft white underbelly provides a very comfortable place for the Lord to relax and enjoy His pastime of yog*a-nidra,* or mystic slumber. This deity is also known locally by the name of Podhanatha Seshashayi. Nearby to the Ksirasagara-kunda is a *kadamba-khandi* or grove of *kadamba* trees and a *jhulana-sthali* which commemorates the swing pastimes enjoyed at this place by Krishna and the *gopis*. The ancient name of this village was Seshashayi and also at one time Ksirasagara and it is also mentioned in the *Puranas* that Seshashayi is one of the *upavanas,* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama.

This temple of Seshashayi Vishnu was visited by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu during His Vraja Mandala Parikrama. When Lord Chaitanya saw the beauty of the deity, He could not contain Himself and became overwhelmed with ecstatic love. While looking at Lakshmiji massaging the feet of Vishnu, He began to recite a verse from *Shrimad Bhagavatam***. "O dearly beloved! Your lotus feet are so soft that we place them gently on our breasts, fearing that your feet will be hurt. Our life rests only in you. Our minds, therefore, are filled with anxiety that your tender lotus feet might be wounded by pebbles as you roam about the forest path."** All the persons who saw Lord Chaitanya in that condition also became filled with ecstasy and began shedding tears of love. Upon seeing the effulgence and the beautiful moon-like face of Mahaprabhu, they said that this *sannyasi* is definitely not an ordinary person, but must be Seshashayi Bhagavana Himself.

Some say that this deity was rediscovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta, but the deity of Sheshashayi Vishnu was seen by Lord Chaitanya during His *parikrama* of Vraja in 1515, and therefore could not have been discovered by Narayana Bhatta. It is thought that Narayana Bhatta may have built a established a temple here for the deity of Seshashayi Visnu.

How To Get There: This place is 12km east of Kotban. (see map no. BM

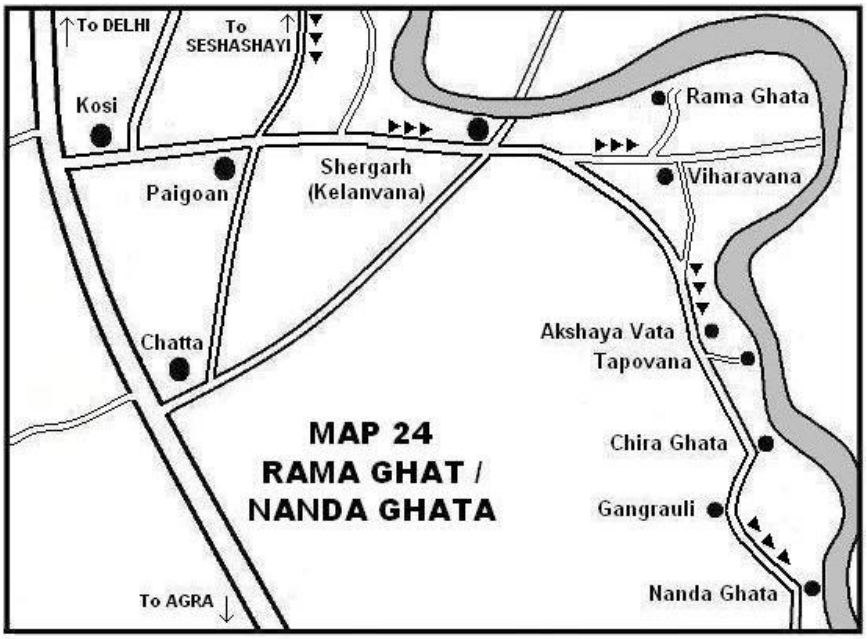
BM.61 **PAYA GRAMA (Paigoan)**

The name of the village is derived from the word *'paya'* or *'payasam'*, which refers to a sweetened and spiced form of 'condensed milk'. The village achieved its name because Krishna and His cowherd boyfriends once drank *paya* here that was given to them by the local villagers. There is also a *kunda* here called Paya-sarovara.

How To Get There: This place is 12km south of Seshashayi and 4km west of Shergarh. (see map no. 24)

BM.62 **KHELANAVANA (Shergarh)**

Situated on the banks of the River Yamuna is the famous forest known as Kelanavana where Krishna and Balarama spent many long hours playing with Their friends. The name 'Kelanavana' means 'the playground forest'. Krishna and Balarama would be so absorbed in playing games in this forest that they would forgot to take their lunch and mother Yashoda would have to personally call them and on some occasions bring Their lunch to the forest.



This place is also known as Kela-tirtha, which means the 'sacred place where children play'. This forest is also referred to as 'Kridavana', which means a 'forest of children's games'. These childhood pastimes at Khelanavana began when Krishna moved from Gokula to Shakatikara and started to graze His calves in this area. Later, when He moved to Nandagrama, Krishna used to meet the *gopis* here and this is one of the forests where *rasa-lila* pastimes took place. The name of this town however changed when the Sultan of Delhi, Sher Shah Suri, who had conquered a large portion of Northern India, decided to build a fort here and changed the name of the town to Shergarh. The ruins of the Sultans fort can still be seen, but the forest of Khelanavana however is no longer visible.

How To Get There: This place is 12km east of Chhata. (see map no. 24)

BM.63 **RAMA GHATA (Ohava)**

This is the celebrated place near the banks of the Yamuna where Lord Balarama performed *rasa-lila* pastimes with His cowherd girlfriends. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says

that Balarama came all the way from Dwaraka to spend time with the residents of Vrindavana, who were continuing to feel acute separation from both Krishna and Himself. On His arrival, Balarama met everyone including mother Yashoda, Nanda Maharaja, the *gopis*, and the cowherd boys, with whom He spent many long hours and was able to somewhat pacify them with soothing words of encouragement. Balarama also met many new *gopis* who were lamenting that they were far too young at the time to take part in Krishna and Balarama's pastimes. During the period of His two months stay, He would enter the forests in the evenings with all His former girlfriends including many new *gopis*, and satisfy their desires to enjoy conjugal love. On the occasion of the full-moon night, Balarama came to Rama Ghata with all these beautiful *gopis* and after they drank *varuni* nectar, a type of honey liquor, they engaged in ecstatic *rasa-lila* pastimes.

After many long hours of *rasa*-dancing, Balarama was feeling a little fatigued and desired to relax in the cooling waters of the Yamuna. Feeling too intoxicated to walk to the river, Balarama called Yamuna Devi to bring her soothing waters to where He was resting, so that He might refresh Himself within the river. Thinking that Balarama was simply too intoxicated with *varuni* liquor to know what He was saying, Yamuna Devi mistakenly ignored His request. Realizing that Yamuna had ignored His order and refused to come there, Balarama became suddenly very angry and His eyes turned a fierce red color, picking up His personal weapon the celebrated plough; He immediately began to drag the Yamuna towards the arena of the *rasa*-dance. Realizing her great mistake, Yamuna Devi immediately came before Balarama, and throwing herself at His lotus feet, begged for forgiveness. Balarama's anger was thus pacified by Yamuna's prayers and He entered the river to relax in its cooling water with His many girlfriends.

In the *Gopala-champu* it says that during that full-moon evening, Balarama married all the *gopis* that came to dance with Him at Rama Ghata in a Gandharva-*vivaha* marriage ceremony. There is a temple here dedicated to Balarama's pastimes known as Khencha-dauji Mandira. The word *'kencha'* means 'to drag' or 'to pull' and refers to Krishna's elder brother Dauji or Balarama, having dragged the Yamuna with His plough at this place. There is also an *asvattha-vriksha* or *peepal* tree, which is said to be one of the *sakhas* or cowherd boyfriends of Lord Balarama.

Lord Nityananda also visited Rama Ghata during His pilgrimage to Vrindavana and stayed here for a few days absorbed in the mood of a cowherd boy. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"During His pilgrimage, Shri Rasa-vilasi Rama, Nityananda Raya, passed some days here. He played with the cowherd boys and ate curd, milk, roots, and fruits whenever He felt hungry. He was perplexed, trying unsuccessfully to conceal His identity as Baladeva. The local people said, 'this must be Rohini-nandana traveling in Vraja as an *avadhuta*.' Seeing Nityananda's divine performance, all the people, young and old alike, were bewildered."** Raghava Pandita showed Shrinivasa and Narottama the *sakata* tree whose wood Nityananda used to clean His teeth. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* continues. **"At Rama Ghata there was a *brahmana* who could not live for a moment without the thought of Baladeva. To satisfy his devotee, Nityananda gave him *darshana* as Baladeva. Here also Kalindi, (another name of Yamuna Devi), offered her prayers to Nityananda. Even the demigods could not restrain their tears of ecstasy as they watched Nityananda sporting at this place. When Nityananda slept on a bed of dust beneath the trees He would call out again and again in His dream, 'When will the emancipation of these wretched souls take place? When will the Lord of Navadwipa advent Himself? I will go and see Him with My own eyes.' No one could understand the meaning of His words."**

How To Get There: This place is 3km east of Shergarh. (see map no. 24)

BM.64 **VIHARAVANA**

Viharavana is one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana. The *Puranas* say that this isolated forest is a place where Krishna and the cowherd boys would bring their cows for grazing. It is also one of the places where Radha and Krishna performed *rasa-lila*

pastimes with the *gopis*. There is a temple here known as Radha-bihari Mandira which is maintained by devotees of the Nimbarka *sampradaya*. Within this forest is a place known as Kacchavana due to a *kunda* located there called Kacchavana-kunda, where Krishna and Balarama and the cowherd boys would play in the water and enjoy themselves by pretending to be turtles. The word *'kaccapa'* or *'kacchua'* means a turtle. The *kunda* which is also called Krishna-kunda as well as Vihara-kunda is teeming with small turtles. The pastime place of Viharavana is said to have been rediscovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta. Nearby to Viharavana is the forest of Bhushanavana where the cowherd boys decorated Krishna with ornaments made from forest flowers. The word *'bhushana'* means 'ornaments'. Nearby is also Gunjanavana where Radharani and the *gopis* decorated Krishna with ornaments and garlands made from *gunja* flowers (*gunja-mala*). Krishna then decorated Radharani with similar ornaments and garlands made from *gunja* flowers. It is said that gunja-beads are very dear to Radharani.

How To Get There: This place is 1.5km south of Rama Ghata. (see map no. 24)

BM.65 **AKSHAYA VATA (Kajarotha)**

This is the sacred place known as Akshaya Vata which was known in ancient times as Bhandira Vata. The word *'akshaya'* means 'everlasting' and the word *'vata'* means a 'banyana tree'. This is the famous banyana tree known as Bhandira Vata mentioned in the *Puranas* where Krishna and Balarama used to graze Their calves and enjoy playing games with Their cowherd boyfriends, and also where Krishna enjoyed many pastimes with Radharani and the *gopis*. The famous Bandira Vata (Akshaya Vata) is listed as one of Braja Mandala's sixteen famous banyana trees. The *Gopala-champu* says that this banyana tree just to the south of Rama Ghata was so vast that its roots and sub-branches spread out right across the Yamuna and the cowherd boys could cross the Yamuna to the eastern bank simply by walking on its branches.

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that the forest surrounding Aksaya Vata which lies a little north of Tapovana, is known both as Bhandira as well as Bhandiravana. Therefore this Bhandiravana at Akshaya Vata should not be confused with the sacred forest of Bhandiravana situated on the eastern bank of the Yamuna just south of Bhadravana, which is a pastime place where the cowherd boys used to take their lunch and where Lord Brahma performed the marriage ceremony of Radha and Krishna. There is overwhelming evidence that this particular Bhandiravana at Aksaya Vata, lying on the western bank of the Yamuna, is the place where Balarama killed the demon Pralambhasura, (although some claim Pralambha was killed in the Bhandiravana lying on the eastern bank of the Yamuna). There is a small village near Akshaya Vata called Gadhibhima which is celebrated as the actual spot where the demon Pralambhasura was slain. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* mentions, "**While traveling on the path from Rama Ghata, the great beauty of the Bhandira forest created restlessness within the minds of Raghava Pandita, Shrinivasa, and Narottama"**. This confirms that there was a forest named Bhandira lying to the south of Rama Ghata. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* further says. **"Look at this beautiful place called Bhandira Vata, presently people call this place as Akshaya Vata. At this place Balarama and Krishna enjoyed their sports. As they played games with Their *sakhas*, the demon Pralambasura in disguise also joined them. Balarama in fun killed Pralambha and in this way Krishna and Balarama enjoyed various pastimes with the *sakhas* here."** This verse confirms that Pralambhasura was killed at Bhandira Vata (Akshaya Vata).

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* also says, **"Just see Ara Grama and Munjatavi near Bhandira where Krishna swallowed the forest fire to rescue the cows and cowherd boys."** Ara Grama is a few kilometers west of Akshaya Vata. The *Vraja-riti-chintamani* mentions that Gopi Ghata and Munjatavi, which lie on the western bank of the Yamuna, are both within the Bhandiravana forest, thus further confirming that Bhandiravana and Bhandira Vata, are one and the same place and presently known as Akshaya Vata. This same Bhandira Vata where Balarama killed Pralambhasura is also the place where Krishna called

the *gopis* with His flute and also the place where the wrestling pastimes of Radha and Krishna took place. This is confirmed by numerous Gaudiya Vaishnava authorities through their writings on Vraja including; Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, Jiva Goswami, Narahari Chakravarti Thakura, Kavi Karnapura, Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura, and Shrila Narayana Bhatta.

The *Chaitanya-charitamrta* also establishes Akshaya Vata as Bhandiravana in the following verses**. "Afterwards, Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu saw Khela-tirtha (Kelanavana) and then went to Bhandiravana. Crossing the Yamuna River He went to Bhadravana. He then visited Shrivana and Lohavana and then went to Mahavana and saw Gokula."** These verses from *Chaitanya-charitamrta* confirm that this was the Bhandiravan at Akshaya Vata that Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited, which is situated on the western bank of the Yamuna just south of Kelanavana and Rama Ghata. There is no record that Lord Chaitanya actually visiting the Bhandiravana on the eastern side of the Yamuna, which the *Bhakti-ratnakara* calls as Bhandari Grama, although He must have passed through it on His way to Bilvavana. The *Gopal-champu* also confirms that Bhandira Vata (Akshaya Vata) is on the western bank of the Yamuna when it says, **"On the western bank of the Yamuna to the north of Bhandiravata is Rama Ghata."** The verse places Bhandiravata (Akshaya Vata) just south of Rama Ghata and on the western bank of the Yamuna.

It is quite evident that at the time of Lord Chaitanya and the Six Goswamis, this banyana tree at Akshaya Vata was recognized as being the famous Bhandira Vata of Vraja Mandala, and the surrounding forest was called Bhandiravana, where so many wonderful pastimes between Radha and Krishna took place. There will always be a number of divergent opinions amongst the research scholars regarding Bhandiravana, as well as many other holy places in the region of Vraja. There is very little historical evidence available other than that written by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, one must therefore accept the opinion of the great liberated souls (*nitya-siddhas*) and the empowered *acharyas* in the line descending from the 'Golden Avatara' Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, including the Six Goswamis and their followers, who were the first to excavate and write about the holy places of Vraja Mandala. It is only through their empowered writings that one can ascertain the actual truth. The past Sanskrit scholars have complained that one or two of the *Puranas* have been tampered with in order to present a version favorable to a particular group or *sampradaya* as reportedly happened in the case of a locally produced version of the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*.

How To Get There: This place is 2km south of Viharavana. (see map no. 24

Radha and Krishna's Pastimes at Bhandira Vata

There were many famous pastimes at Akshaya Vata between Radha and Krishna and in the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it is said. **"One day, Krishna sat beneath a *vata* tree in Bhandira, He played his flute in such an enchanting tone that it could drive the whole world mad. When Radha heard the sound of the flute, She became agitated and ran to meet Krishna along with her girlfriends. In great ecstasy, Radha and Krishna then enjoyed various sporting pastimes here along with Their *sakhis.*"**

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* gives another description of the transcendental pastime that occurred here **"One day Radha asked Krishna in Her soft voice, 'How do you play with your friends at this place?' Krishna answered, 'I dress as a wrestler and I wrestle with my friends. No one knows wrestling like Me and I win very easily.' Lalita smiled and requested Krishna again and again to show them His wrestling while dressed-up in His wrestlers dress. They then changed into wrestlers costumes, but Krishna was very proud of His dress. Radha smiled sweetly when she saw Krishna's wrestling costume and They both entered the wrestling arena. There was no question of winning or losing in that wrestling match and Kandarpa, the god of love, was satisfied to watch the game. In this way, various wonderful pastimes were performed in Bhandiravana. Who can describe them all?"** In the *Vraja-vilasa-stava* of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami it says. **"In the forest of Bhandira, my beautiful queen, proud Shri Radha, started a wrestling**

competition amongst Her closest friends. When She eagerly wrestled with Lord Krishna, the enemy of Bakasura, She brought great happiness to Cupid the god of love. Let me worship that forest of Bhandiravana."

The Slaying of Pralambhasura at Bhandira Vata

One day while herding their calves in the vicinity of Akshaya Vata, Krishna and Balarama along with their cowherd boyfriends, began a game where those who lost had to carry the winners on their shoulders. Having been ordered by King Kamsa to kill Krishna and Balarama, the demon Pralambhasura, who by dint of his mystic power, had assumed the form of a cowherd boy and cleverly mingled with the other boys, but his intention was to kidnap Krishna and Balarama and then kill Them. The demon disguised as a cowherd boy, joined Krishna's team and in the next round of the competition, Krishna's team lost, therefore Krishna had to carry Shridama on His shoulders and the demon Pralambha had to carry Balarama. While carrying Balarama on his shoulders, Pralambhasura began running at great speed and carried Balarama far away with the intention of killing Him. However, Balarama appeared to be getting heavier and heavier by the minute, and therefore Pralambhasura was forced to assume his original demonic form. Balarama suddenly noticed that the cowherd boy carrying Him had suddenly changed his appearance and had transformed into giant black colored demon with long sharpened teeth. At that moment, Balarama decided it was time to slay this sinful and ugly looking rascal and immediately struck the demon on the head with His powerful fist. Pralambhasura immediately cried out in great pain and while spewing blood from his gaping mouth, fell to the ground dead. Krishna then arrived there with all the cowherd boys and congratulated Balarama for His heroic feat in killing the demon Pralambha.

BM.66 **TAPOVANA (Gopi Ghata)**

Tapovana is mentioned in the *Puranas* to be one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana. This sacred *tirtha* near the banks of the Yamuna is where the *gopis* performed *tapasya* during the month-long Katyayani *vrata* to achieve Krishna as their husband. On the last day of the *vrata*, the *gopis* went to Chira Ghata to worship the deity of Katyayani Devi. The name Tapovana is derived from the words *'tapa'* or *'tapasya'* which means to perform 'austerities', and *'vana'* means 'forest'. There is a temple here known as the Radha Gunja-bihari Mandira. It is said that the *gopis* who performed *tapasya* at Tapovana were the *kripa-siddha* and *sadhana-siddha gopis* like the sages of Naimisharanya forest, who had received the benediction from Lord Ramachandra to take their next birth as *gopis* in Vrindavana and achieve the divine association of Krishna, as well as the Apsaras who were blessed by Nara-Narayana Rishi to achieve the position of *gopis*. Gopi Ghata is the name of the bathing place on the Yamuna river at Tapovana where the *gopis* would take their ritualistic bath in the Yamuna in the early morning hours during the *brahma-muhurta*, as part of their month long austerities during the cold season to achieve Krishna as their husband.

How To Get There: This place is 1km southeast of Akshaya Vata. (see map no. 24)

BM.67 **CHIRA GHATA (Siyaro)**

This is the celebrated *ghata* where Krishna stole the clothing of the *gopis*. The word *'chira'* means 'clothing'. After following the Katyayani *vrata* for one month by undergoing austerities at Tapovana, the *gopis* came here on the final day of the *vrata* to make a clay image of Katyayani Devi and perform *puja* by offering incense, flowers, and ghee lamps to the goddess, who is worshiped in her form as eight-armed Durga riding a tiger. Before starting the Katyayani-*puja,* the *gopis* went to take their ceremonial bath in the Yamuna and kept their clothing on the river bank. Meanwhile, understanding the minds of the *gopis* to obtain Him as their husband, Krishna arrived there and after gathering all the *gopi's* clothes, climbed into a nearby *kadamba* tree. Krishna then called the *gopis* to come and collect their clothing, one at a time, saying He wanted to enjoy the beauty of each slender wasted *gopi* as

she collected her clothing. The *gopis* were the most beautiful women in the whole universe, far exceeding the beauty of heavenly Apsaras, or even the Lakshmis of Vaikuntha.

At first the *gopis* strongly protested Krishna's actions, but inwardly they felt very satisfied that Krishna wanted to see them naked and admire their exquisite beauty. In Vedic culture, a young woman should only exhibit her naked beauty before her husband and no one else, therefore, Krishna was assuming the position of each *gopi's* husband, by seeing them stand before Him in their naked splendor. The *gopis* realized they had no option but to come out of the Yamuna one at a time. Slowly, each naked *gopi* emerged from the river to collect her clothing from Krishna's hand, allowing Him to see the incredible beauty of their delicately formed limbs, thus fulfilling the *gopi's* desire to have Krishna as their husband. After enjoying their beauty, Krishna gave a promise to the *gopis* that in the near future, during the autumn season, they would be able to enjoy Him as their husband, by engaging with Him in conjugal pastimes in the forest of Vrindavana.

There is a temple here dedicated to goddess Katyayani Devi that commemorates the transcendental pastime that took place here. It is said that this *tirtha* was re-discovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta and Shrila Jiva Goswami has confirmed that this is the original Chira Ghata mentioned in the *Bhagavatam,* and the actual spot where the *gopis* worshiped goddess Katyayani and where Krishna stole their clothing. Just near to Keshi Ghata in Vrindavana there is another Chira Ghata, which is more properly called as Chayana Ghata, where Krishna rested (*chayana*) after killing the Keshi demon. There was also a pastime of hiding the *gopis* clothing at Chayana Ghata (Chira Ghata), when Krishna temporarily hid the *gopis* clothing while they bathed in the Yamuna after performing *rasa-lila* at Seva Kunja. On that occasion the *gopis* were not naked but were wearing undergarments.

How To Get There: Chira Ghata is 1km from Tapovana, and 2km south of Akshaya Vata. (see map no. 24)

BM.68 **GANGRAULI**

It is said that this is the village where Gargamuni, the family priest of Nanda Maharaja had his *ashrama*, and where he had his meeting place (*baithaka*). Gargamuni, who is also known as Gargacharya, performed the name giving ceremony of Krishna and Balarama and also made various astronomical calculations about both past and future events in Their lives. It is also said that both Krishna and Balarama came here to this *ashrama* to receive instructions from Gargamuni. There is a Radha Krishna temple in the village containing the deity of Gargamuni. Next to this temple is Dhoni-kunda, where it is said Krishna was once milking a cow and knocked over the milk pale (*dhoni*) and the milk that spilled out of the pale caused this *kunda* to form.

How To Get There: This village is 2km south of Chira Ghata. (see map no. 24)

BM.69 **NANDA GHATA (Baigram)**

This is the famous *ghata* on the Yamuna River where Nanda Maharaja was arrested by the servants of Varuna Deva, the demigod of the waters. It so happened that on the occasion of *ekadashi*, Nanda Maharaja, Krishna's father, had fasted the whole day and the following morning, the day of *dwadashi*, he decided to take an early morning ritualistic bath in the River Yamuna before breaking fast. Unfortunately, he arrived at the river bank before the appointed hour and as soon as he entered the water to bathe, he was immediately arrested by the servants of Varuna Deva, who accused him of bathing at an improper time, and took him away to the court of Varuna to be punished. The moment that Nanda Maharaja was arrested, Nanda's companions immediately informed Krishna and Balarama about the sudden turn of events. The two transcendental brothers could immediately understand the situation and straight away left for the abode of Varuna to rescue their father Nanda Maharaja.

As soon as Krishna and Balarama arrived at the abode of Varuna, They were welcomed with great respect. Varuna Deva humbly addressed Krishna and Balarama by saying that it was his great fortune to be able to see the Supreme Personality of Godhead present before his eyes, and because of seeing Them, he would not have to take birth again.

Varuna also said that because he was personally seen Krishna and Balarama before his eyes, his life was now perfect. Varuna Deva also apologized on behalf of his servants, who he said had inadvertently arrested Nanda Maharaja, and informed Krishna and Balarama that They could now take Their father back home. Varuna further said that it was only by the will of providence that this whole incident had been allowed to take place.

Nanda Ghata is situated near the village of Baigram sometimes called Bhogoan, which are corruptions of the ancient name Bhaya Grama. The word *'bhaya'* means 'fear' and the village was so named because both Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men experienced great fear at this place after Nanda had been arrested by the servants of Varuna. There is a temple here containing the deities of Nanda Maharaja and mother Yashoda along with Krishna and Balarama.

Jiva Goswami's stay at Nanda Ghata

Shrila Jiva Goswami spent some time staying at Nanda Ghata where he lived inside an old disused crocodile hole on the bank of the Yamuna. Due to his youthful enthusiasm, he was banished from Vrindavana by Shrila Rupa Goswami because he dared to challenge Vallabha Bhatta, thus displeasing Rupa Goswami, his uncle and spiritual master. One day Vallabha Bhatta, who was later known as Vallabhacharya, paid a visit to Rupa Goswami's *bhajana kutira* at Seva Kunja. When he arrived, Rupa was working on the invocation to his book *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* (Nectar of Devotion). On glancing at the *mangalacharana* or invocation, Vallabha, who was a greatly learned Sanskrit scholar, pointed out what he thought were some slight discrepancies in the text and offered to edit it. Although Rupa accepted this criticism by Vallabha with great humility, Jiva was disturbed that Vallabha had the audacity to find fault with Rupa Goswami's writing.

Therefore, when Vallabha went to the Yamuna to bathe, Jiva followed him and raised the issue of Vallabha's critique regarding the invocation written by Rupa Goswami. Jiva then systematically refuted with *shastric* evidence each of the points raised by Vallabha, thus proving to Vallabha that he was wrong in his opinions and that what Rupa had written was actually perfect and needed no editing. Confronted by Jiva's superior knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, Vallabha was defeated and forced to admit his critique was misguided. On returning to Rupa's *kutira*, Vallabha mentioned his encounter with the young *sannyasi* and the discussion that had ensued, informing Rupa that the original invocation was perfect and needed no correction. Sometime later, when Jiva returned, Rupa Goswami was very upset that Jiva had dared to challenge such a senior devotee and greatly learned scholar like Vallabha Bhatta. Admonishing Jiva for being too proud and lacking in proper Vaishnava humility, Rupa ordered him to return to his home in Bengal until he had learned more about Vaishnava etiquette and humility. He further said that Vallabha Bhatta was only trying to help and that due to his passionate nature; Jiva had unnecessarily challenged him.

After being rejected by Rupa Goswami, Jiva was on his way out of Vrindavana when he decided it was better to remain in the holy Dhama and undergo severe penance in order to redeem himself in the eyes of Rupa Goswami. He then went to Nanda Ghata and remained there living in an old crocodile hole. Later the *Vrajavasis* built him a *kutira* of thatched leaves. He subsisted by performing *madhukari*, begging a little flour from the local *Vrajavasis* and after mixing it with water from the Yamuna, ate it raw. No one in Vrindavana knew the whereabouts of Jiva until one day; Sanatana Goswami was traveling to some of the holy places nearby, when someone mentioned to him about a young and much renounced *sannyasi* living at Nanda Ghata. Sanatana was informed that the young *sannyasi* was very frail and thin due to subsisting only on raw flour and water. Sanatana could immediately understand that the young *sannyasi* must be his nephew Jiva. After going there and meeting Jiva at Nanda Ghata and hearing everything from him, Sanatana returned to Vrindavana to meet Rupa, whose writing work was suffering due to not having Jiva there to help him. It was Jiva who used to make the paper for writing and also edit all of Rupa's books.

On arriving in Vrindavana, Rupa Goswami was talking with other Vaishnavas on the subject of giving mercy to all the *jivas* (living entities). After the talks, Sanatana spoke to Rupa and enquired about the work on his most important book the *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu*. Rupa explained that his book was finished, but since their nephew Jiva's absence, the editing work was incomplete and not going so well. Sanatana then told Rupa that although he was lecturing others about giving mercy to all the *jivas*, he himself was not. Rupa Gosvami could immediately understand the meaning of Sanatana's comment.

After hearing about Jiva's whereabouts from Sanatana, without further delay, Rupa Goswami made arrangements to bring Jiva Goswami back to Vrindavana and after nursing him back to full health, immediately entrusted him with the task of editing the *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, the most important book on the science of devotional service ever written. Under the direct guidance of his two uncles Rupa and Sanatana, Jiva Goswami went on to become the greatest ever Sanskrit scholar and philosopher that has ever lived. So great was his scholarship, that when the Benares Hindu University was established, a Sanskrit department was named in his honor. After the disappearance of both Rupa and Sanatana, Jiva Goswami was the undisputed leader amongst Lord Chaitanya's followers and became the next *acharya* of the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya*. He went on to write over twenty-five important books of which *Sat Sandharba* and *Gopala-champu* are the most well known.
How To Get There: This place is (3km) south of Chira Ghata. (see map no. 24)

THE VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA NOW CROSSES THE YAMUNA RIVER AT NANDA GHATA TO REACH THE FOREST OF BHADRAVANA

During Lord Chaitanya's *parikrama* of Vraja Mandala, He crossed the Yamuna River at Nanda Ghata and proceeded to the sacred forest of Bhadravana. Therefore, the Vraja Mandala Parikrama followed by all Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees also crosses the Yamuna River at Nanda Ghata, and proceeds southwards along the eastern bank of the Yamuna to the sacred forest of Bhadravana.

BM.70 **BHADRAVANA**

Bhadravana is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja where Krishna and Balarama used to bring Their cows for grazing. The word *'bhadra'* means 'attractive' and the forest has a *parikrama* of around five kilometers but unfortunately little remains of this forest today. It says in the *Adi-varaha Purana* that whoever visits the sacred forest of Bhadravana will become a single-minded devotee of Lord Krishna. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that one who performs pilgrimage to Bhadravana will achieve the heavenly planets at death. There is an very ancient Shiva-*linga* here known as the Bhadrishwara Mahadeva which local *panditas* say was established by Vajranabha Maharaja and there was once a sacred *kunda* here known as Bhadra-sarovara which has now disappeared.

The name 'Bhadra' in 'Bhadravana' means that this forest was the transcendental playground of Lord Balabhadra (Balarama), who enjoyed pastimes here with the cowherd boys. Just as Krishna and Balarama have Their own separate groups of *gopis* and *gopas*, so they also have Their own forests. In the *Gopala-tapani Upanishad*, the four forests on the eastern bank of the Yamuna including; Bhadravana, Bhandiravana, Bilvavana, and Lauhavana, belong to Balarama, the other eight forests belong to Krishna.

Some people say that the demon Vatsasura was killed at Bhadravana but this is not supported by any *sastric* evidence. Vatsasura was the first demon to be killed by Krishna after He moved from Gokula to Vrindavana (Sakatikara). During this period of Krishna's *pauganda-lila*, all the demons including Vatsasura, Bakasura, Aghasura, and Pralambhasura, were killed on the western bank of the Yamuna in the area referred to in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* as Vrindavana forest. In fact, in the *Ananda Vrindavana Champu*, Krishna asks Balarama if the unusual looking calf (Vatsasura) actually belonged to Vrindavana or not. Kamsa also told Vatsasura to go to Nanda's Vraja in order to find Krishna, and Bhadravana is

not in the area called Nanda's Vraja. In the *Gopala-champu* of Shrila Jiva Goswami, it is said that the area just north of Vrindavana forest on the western bank of the Yamuna is the pasturing ground called Vatsa-krida, meaning the area where Krishna used to herd His the calves (*vatsa*), and this was the actual place where Vatsasura was killed and not at Bhadravana.

How To Get There: This place is 6km east of Nanda Ghata and 9km north of Matha. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.71 **BHANDIRAVANA (Chhanhari)**

This is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja and in the *Adi-varaha Purana* it says. **"The forest of Bhandiravana is a very beautiful place which is very dear to the yogis. Simply glancing at the forest saves one from taking another birth. Getting the**

***darshana* of Lord Vasudeva in this forest, the best forest of all, also saves one from another birth. Any person who takes bath here, fasts and controls his senses becomes freed from all sins and goes to Indraloka."** This forest has an individual *parikrama* of around five kilometers, although only part of what was once a vast forest still exists today. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that while herding Their cows, Krishna and Balarama used to come to this forest along with Their cowherd boyfriends and enjoyed playing various games, after which they would take their lunch under the cooling shade of the large banyana trees that grew in this forest. It is also said that the cowherd boys used to enjoy wrestling and other sporting pastimes here at Bhandiravana. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it states. **"In Bhandiravana, Krishna and His friends, after playing, enjoyed various food preparations while sitting in the shade. This village is therefore called Chhanhari after this pastime."** The present name of the village located here is Chhanhari which is derived from the word *'chaya'* which means 'shade', or the place where the cowherd boys sat under the shade of the banyana trees to take lunch. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* does not mention any other pastimes between Krishna and the *gopis* here accept the *rasa-lila* pastimes that occurred at the nearby Vamsi Vata, which is also known as Sridhama Vata.

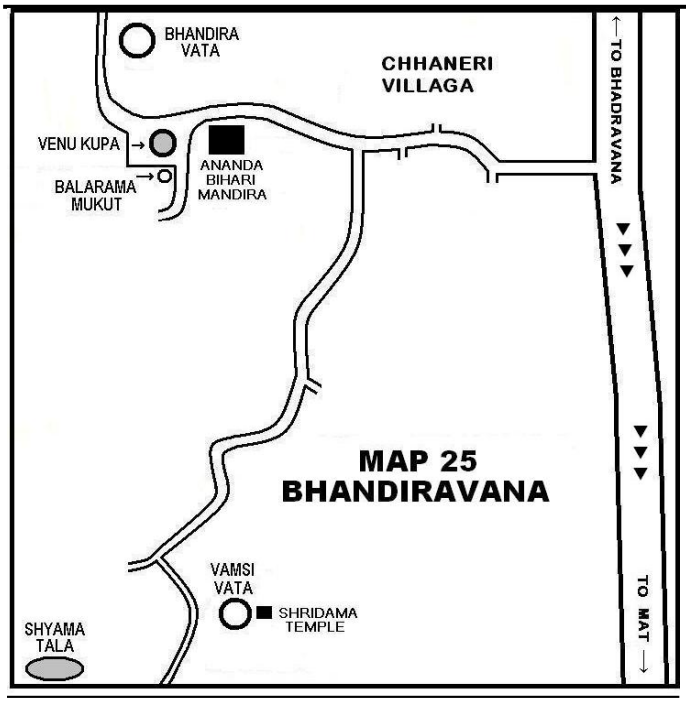
The *Gopala-champu* mentions that during the great exodus from Mahavana forest, when Nanda Maharaja and all the residents of Gokula decided to move to the safety of Vrindavana due to the constant attack of demons, they crossed the Yamuna at a very shallow part of the river near the forest of Bhandiravan while the cows crossed the river near Nanda Ghata. After crossing the Yamuna they saw the great beauty of Vrindavana forest and the lush green pasturing grounds known as *vatsa-krida*.

One of the most celebrated pastimes that took place here at Bhandiravana is mentioned in the *Garga Samhita* which reveals that Radha and Krishna were secretly married here at Bhandiravana during their infancy, when They were no more than two or three years old, in a ceremony conducted by Lord Brahma and attended by the host of demigods. This pastime is not mentioned in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* or any other literature. The marriage ceremony was performed for the specific satisfaction of Lord Brahma and the demigods and not even the parents of Radha or Krishna witnessed it. The *Gopala-champu* also mentions another marriage ceremony between Radha and Krishna that took place at Gauravai near Gokula, which was conducted for the specific pleasure of Nanda Maharaja and mother Yashoda. This marriage ceremony took place after Krishna had returned from Dwaraka to meet all the *Vrajavasis*. At that time Krishna not only married Radharani but all the *gopis* who had enjoyed pastimes with Him in the forest of Vrindavana, in a ceremony overseen by Purnamasi Devi (Yogamaya).

There is some confusion regarding this particular Bhandiravana, with some people claiming that this is the place where the demon Pralambhasura was killed, but this is incorrect and without scriptural support. According to Gaudiya Vaishnava authorities, Pralambhasura was killed at Bhandira Vata, which is presently known as Akshaya Vata, where the wrestling pastimes of Radha and Krishna also took place. At the time of the Six Goswamis, Bhandira Vata (Akshaya Vata) was also called Bhandiravana, and this is how the

confusion has arisen. Even the *Chaitanya-charitamrita* refers to Bhandira Vata (Akshaya Vata) as Bhandiravana. It is also interesting to note that although Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited Bhandira Vata (also called Bhandiravana) on the western bank of the Yamuna south of Rama Dhata, it does not mention that He visited the Bhandiravana on the eastern bank of the Yamuna south of Bhadravana, although He must have walked through this forest on His way to Bilvavana, Lauhavana, and Gokula.

How To Get There: This forest is 2km south of Bhadravana and 2km north of Mat. (see map no. 25)



Places of Interest at Bhandiravana

B.1 **Venu Kupa (Bhandari Kupa)**

This particular well is believed to have been created when Krishna pushed His flute into the ground to provide drinking water to quench the thirst of the cowherd boys. The word *'venu'* refers to Krishna's 'flute' and *'kupa'* means a 'well', There is a large festival held here every year in the month of *Ashada* (June-July) on the occasion of *amavasya*, or the dark-moon day when the moon is not visible, when thousands of *Vrajavasis* gather to bathe in the water of this well. It is believed that if childless couples desiring to have offspring take bath here on this particular day, their desires will be fulfilled. Locals say that if this particular *amavasya* falls on a Monday (*Somavati-amavasya*), the water in the well turns a whitish color just like milk. Opposite to the well is the small temple known as the Radha Ananda-bihari Mandira.

Some people say that this well was created by Krishna so He could take bath after killing the calf-demon Vatsasura, because the *gopis* forbade Krishna to touch them until He purified Himself from the sin of cow-killing. But this version cannot be accepted because at the time of killing Vatsasura, Krishna was living at Shakatikara, and was only about four years old and still enjoying His *pauganda-lila* or boyhood pastimes. During this period, Krishna never associated with the *gopis* at any time and therefore the subject of the *gopis* forbidding Krishna to touch them does not even arise. It is mentioned in the *Bhagavatam* that the first time the *gopis* actually saw Krishna was during the pastimes of subduing of the

Kaliya serpent and swallowing the forest fire at Davanala-kunda, when the *gopis* became captivated by Krishna's incredible transcendental beauty.

In the *Gopala-champu* it says, **"When Krishna emerged from the lake of Kaliya, Radha and the other *gopis* saw His remarkable beauty for the first time and they immediately fainted in ecstasy, but continued to see Him internally within their hearts. They were in a constant state of fainting and reawakening, remaining in that condition for many days and nights".** At Davanala-kunda the *gopis* could only gaze in ore at Krishna's beautiful lotus face and try to attract His attention with their meaningful side-long glances, but they did not directly associate with Him until much later when Krishna moved to Nandagrama at the age of six, which also marked the beginning of His *kaisora-lila* or period of youth-hood, when His intimate pastimes with Radharani began and Their first direct meeting took place at Sanket.

Vatsasura was the first demon to be killed by Krishna after Nanda Maharaja moved his residence from Gokula to Vrindavana (Sakatikara). On arrival at Sakatikara, Krishna began herding the calves in the area north of Vrindavana called Vatsa-krida, which means the 'place of herding calves', which is revealed in Gaudiya Vaishnava scriptures to be the place where Vatsasura was killed, and not at Bhandiravana or Bhadravana, as some claim. Vatsa-krida is the site on the western bank of the Yamuna where Krishna and Balarama enjoyed the entirety of Their *pauganda-lila* or boy-hood pastimes and where They killed all the demons during this phase of Their life including; Vatsasura, Aghasura, Bakasura, and Pralambhasura. Towards the end of Their *pauganda* pastimes the ass-demon Denukasura was killed to the south of Vrindavana in the forest of Talavana and then the two transcendental brothers moved to Dig, Kamyavana, and then to Nandagrama. According to Jiva Goswami's *Gopala-champu*, when King Kamsa ordered the demon Vatsasura to kill Krishna, he told him he could find Him in Nanda's Vraja at the place known as Vatsa-krida, where He herded the calves. Nanda's Vraja is the area that extends from Vrindavana to Nandagrama and covers the region known as Vatsa-krida and Vatsa-vana on the western bank of the Yamuna.

How To Get There: This well is 450mt from the main road at Chhanhari Village. (see map no. 25)

B.2 Balarama Mukut

Just next to Venu Kupa, one can see what is said to be the impression of Balarama's crown (*mukut*) upon a rock. It is said that Balarama once rested here and took off His *mukut* when He lay down. Locals say He rested here after slaying Pralambhasura, but that seems highly unlikely, as that demon was killed near Bhandira Vata (Akshaya Vata) at a village called Gadhibhima on the other side of the Yamuna, also called Bhandiravana. Another consideration is that if Balarama felt fatigued, He would surely have rested there, rather than cross the river and travel fifteen kilometers to rest here. There is also no *shastric* evidence that Balarama rested after killing Pralambhasura, and besides this, Balarama was riding on the demon's shoulders and simply smashed the demon's head with His powerful fist, He did not exert Himself in any way whereby he would need to take rest. It is more likely that after eating lunch with the cowherd boys, Balarama took off His *mukut* when lying down to rest while the cowherd boys massaged His feet and fanned Him with bunches of leaves.

How To Get There: This place is next to the Venu Kupa. (see map no. 25)

B.3 Baladeva Mandira (Dauji Mandira)

This temple is dedicated to Lord Balarama who enjoyed many wonderful pastimes with Krishna and the cowherd boys here at Bhandiravana, including taking lunch beneath the cooling shade of the banyana trees (*vata-vriksha*). There are many temples of Dauji on this side of the Yamuna because Lord Balarama is considered the predominating deity of the eastern petal of Vraja. In fact, there are many temples dedicated to Lord Balarama (Dauji) in all the holy places of Vraja Mandala, which testifies to the great esteem and love which the Vaishnavas and *Vrajavasis* have for Krishna's elder brother.

How To Get There: (see map no. 25)

B.4 **Bhandira Vata**

This is the sacred spot beneath the shade of this ancient banyana tree (*vata-vriksa*), which is known as the Bhandira Vata and is the place where Lord Brahma performed the *vivaha-lila*, or the wedding ceremony between Radha and Krishna which is mentioned in the *Garga Samhita*.

How To Get There: This *vata* tree is 500mt from the main road at Chhanhari Village. (see map no. 25)

The Marriage Ceremony of Radha and Krishna

The forest of Bhandiravana is most famous because it was at this place under the celebrated banyana tree known as Bhandira Vata, that Radha and Krishna were married. The wonderful story of this pastime was spoken by Shrila Narada Muni and has been recorded in the *Garga Samita* as follows. One day, Nanda Maharaja came to Bhandiravana from Gokula to graze his cows near the banks of the Yamuna, and was carrying his little boy Krishna in his arms. By the will of *yogamaya*, a strong wind suddenly began to blow causing all the leaves on the trees to fall and ripples to appear over the surface of the Yamuna. The sky immediately became dark and overcast as blackish rain-clouds assembled threateningly overhead. When the clouds loudly thundered, Krishna became frightened and started to cry, forcing Nanda Baba to cuddle Him closer to his chest. The day seemed to turn into night as darkness spread in all directions.

Just then, a shining light as brilliant as ten million suns appeared from nowhere. From within that shining light, Nanda Baba could see standing before him, the youthful, charming, and exquisitely beautiful form of Shrimati Radharani, the daughter of his friend Vrishabhanu. She bore the luster of a thousand moons and was wearing a deep blue *sari* and Her pinkish lotus feet were decorated with golden anklets that jingled sweetly. She was adorned with a golden waistband, a necklace, armlets, and bangles, and She wore a pearl in Her nose that appeared like a small moon orbiting Her full moon-like face. She had a golden *Shri-kanta* around Her neck, glittering golden earrings, and a glittering jewel-studded diadem situated on Her head.

Nanda Maharaja was struck with wonder at Her effulgence which appeared to light up the entire world. He immediately bowed his head and offered his heartfelt respects to Radharani saying, “See this child in my arms, He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and I know that You are His eternal consort. Oh Radhe! I have heard this great secret from Gargamuni, therefore take this child, Your Lord, from my arms, He has become frightened due to the thundering of the clouds.” Radha then took Krishna in Her arms and as Nanda Baba offered his humble obeisances, She entered the Bhandiravana forest holding Krishna tightly in Her embrace.

At that very moment, the holy land of Vrindavana assumed a divine form, the dark rain-clouds scattered and the wind subsided into a gentle breeze. Bhumi Devi, the mother earth and consort of Lord Vishnu, appeared there in her eternal form causing the earth to flourish as if it was spring-time. The *gopis* headed by Vrinda Devi also appeared there along with the cowherd boys to witness the special occasion. The crystal clear waters of the Yamuna glistened and became beautified by jeweled staircases and golden terraces. In the distance, the rocks on Govardhana Hill appeared like great jewels and its peaks shone like gold. With its cascading waterfalls and deep caverns, its huge body appeared like the king of elephants. The sweet smelling lotus flowers in the lakes around Vrindavana began to bloom simultaneously, causing the bumblebees to become madly intoxicated by the delicate aroma that emanated from them. The peacocks, cuckoos, pigeons, and other song-birds began to resound, creating a celestial chorus that permeated the entire forest of Bhandiravana. In each of the *nikunjavans*, multicolored banners flapped joyously in the breeze announcing a very special event. Then the Lord of creation, who was being carried in the arms of Radha, suddenly assumed His eternal youthful form of Govinda, that defeated millions upon millions

of Cupids, and clasping the hand of His beloved Radha, They both gracefully entered the nuptial arena that was decorated with all the paraphernalia for a wedding ceremony.

Then as the 'divine couple' Radha and Krishna sat down beneath the Bhandira Vata on a golden throne. Lord Brahma, who was to officiate as the head priest, arrived there with the host of demigods through the celestial airways. After offering His humble obeisance's by bowing down, He began to speak brilliant words in glorification saying, "Anyone who speaks about Your divine transcendental attributes and sings Your praises automatically achieves complete beauty, wealth and perfection, even in this life. Even though you are equal to each other, nevertheless, for the sake of fulfilling local customs, I am going to perform Your marriage ceremony." Lord Brahma then kindled the sacrificial fire and after offering oblations into it, asked Radha and Krishna to accept each other's hands. After chanting the sacred Vedic mantras, and seeing that the corners of Their clothing was tied together, Brahma requested the 'divine lovers' to circumambulate the sacrificial fire seven times according to the Vedic system. After this, Lord Brahma had Radha place Her hand on Krishna's chest and Krishna's hand on Radha's back, after which They recited their wedding vows and offered garlands to each other. At that moment, the demigods showered flowers from the sky, and while playing on various musical instruments and beating on hundreds of celestial drums; they began dancing along with their beautiful wives in great transcendental ecstasy.

Philosophical Considerations Regarding the Marriage of Radha and Krishna

This incident of the marriage ceremony between Radha and Krishna was enacted for the specific pleasure of Lord Brahma and the demigods, in a pastime which fulfilled their desire to see Radha and Krishna married together in a wedding ceremony in accordance with the standard social customs of Vedic culture. This was because Lord Brahma knew in the future that the divine pastimes of *parakiya-rasa* revealed by Radha and Krishna on the earthly plain, would be severely criticized and misunderstood by mundane moralists and so-called religionists, and therefore to preempt all false criticism, Lord Brahma personally performed Their marriage ceremony while Radha and Krishna were still in Their infancy.

According to Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy as propounded by Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Shri Shri Radha and Krishna, in Their original manifested forms are not married, but remain as eternal lovers in the mood of *parakiya-bhava*, which means a conjugal relationship as paramours. This is because the super-excellent *parakiya-bhava* manifests the greatest transcendental pleasure for Radha and Krishna as well as Their eternal servitors the *gopis*, and is therefore regarded as the most superior form of *bhava* or loving mood within the category of *madhurya-rasa*, which is itself considered the most superior amongst the five essential *rasas*. Another point is that at the time of this ceremony at Bhandiravana, both Radha and Krishna were still only about two or three years old and enjoying Their *kaumara-lilas*, or pastimes as little children at Gokula and Ravala respectively. This manifestation of the wedding ceremony at Bhandiravana was certainly a unique spiritual event similar to the secret manifestation of the Yoga-pitha, or the pastimes of *aprakata-lila*.

B.5 **Vamsi Vata (Shridama Vata)**

This particular Vamsi Vata at Bhandiravana, which is also known as Shridama Vata, is different from the celebrated Vamsi Vata near Dhira-samira in Vrindavana. It is said that Krishna once called all the *gopis* here to enjoy *rasa-lila* pastimes by playing the most enchanting tune on His celebrated *vamsi* (flute). However this particular Vamsi Vata appears to be more closely connected to Krishna's pastimes with the cowherd boys and in particular Radha's brother Shridama who held great attachment to Bhandiravana. It is said that at this place under the *vata* tree, Krishna would play His *vamsi* or flute in order to call all the cows together before returning home in the late afternoon. It has been mentioned in the *Gopala-champu* that there was a crossing point for the cows in a shallow part of the Yamuna near Nanda Ghata.

How To Get There: This *vata* tree is 250mt south of Bhandira Vata. (see map no. 25)

B.6 **Shridama Mandira**

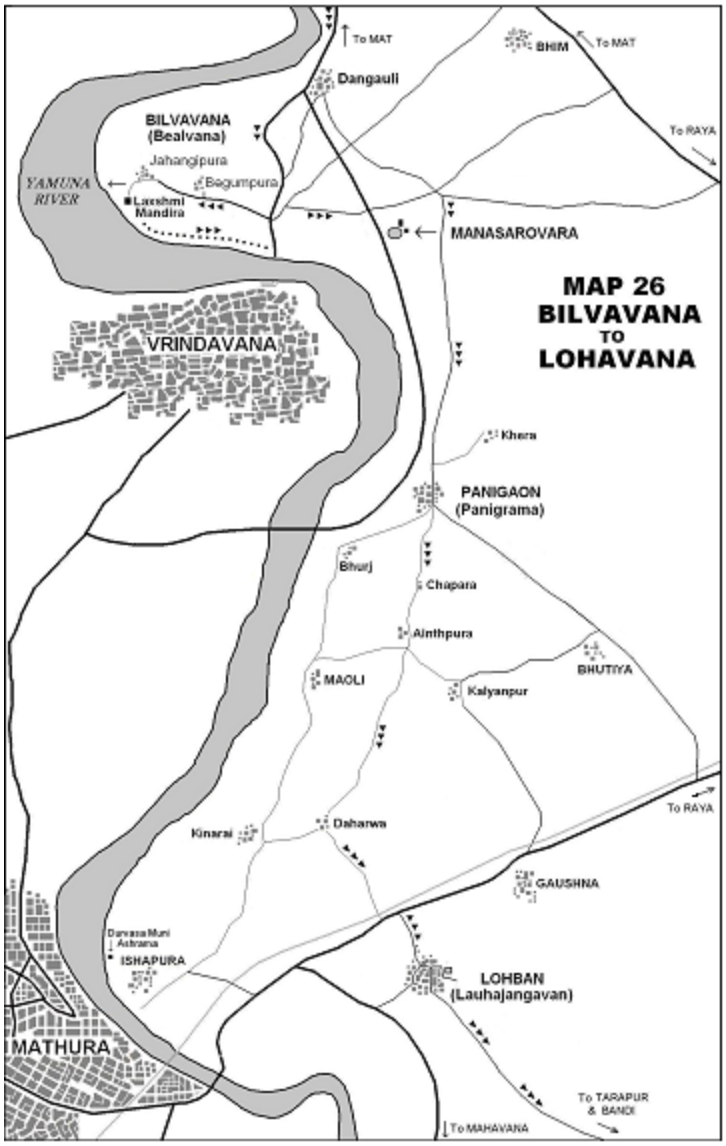
Beneath the banyana tree which is known as Vamsi Vata as well as Shridama Vata, is a temple dedicated to Krishna's great friend Shridama, who was Radharani'a elder brother. In the temple is a deity of Shridama playing a *vamsi* or flute. When Krishna left Vrindavana for Mathura, He promised to return as soon as possible, but Shridama was so upset at Krishna's sudden departure that he decided to come here where he had enjoyed so much fun playing with Krishna, and sit in meditation on those incredible pastimes until the day his friend would return. Since then, this banyana tree became celebrated as Shridama Vata. Although Krishna did not immediately return, He did eventually return to Vrindavana from Dwaraka, and after slaying the demon Dantavakra at Datiya Village, Krishna once again met His dearly beloved friend Shridama and all the *Vrajavasis* at Gorai near Mahavana.

How To Get There: This temple is below the Vamsi Vata tree. (see map no. 25)

B.7 **Shyama Tala**

This *kunda* is near Vamsi Vata and is said to have been created by Krishna (Shyama) with His flute to satisfy the *gopis* thirst after they had been dancing all night long with Him in the *rasa-lila* at this place. The word *'tala'* or *'talaiya'* generally refers to a large lake. This *tala* however is usually always dry accept sometimes in the rainy season.

How To Get There: This *tala* is 100mt south of Vamsi Vata. (see map no. 25)



BM.72 **MATHA (Mat)**

Krishna and Balarama along with the cowherd boys used to bring their cows to this forest for grazing. Matha which is also called Mathavana is mentioned to be one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama. In this village one can see the Dauji Mandira which is dedicated to Krishna's elder brother Balarama. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"In Matha-grama, Rama and Krishna used to play with Their friends. The huge earthen pot of the name *'matha'*, which the *Vrajavasis* used to make *matha* (buttermilk) from curd, is the source of the name of this holy place, Matha."** It is said that Krishna and Balarama along with all Their friends, used to come here to enjoy drinking freshly made buttermilk, called locally as *matha* or *chasa*. The word '*matha'* is derived from the word '*manthana*' which means the 'process of churning'. When curd (yogurt) is churned it produces both *chasa* (buttermilk also called whey) and purified butter, which is also called ghee. The large earthen pots known as *matha* or *mathi* were also used by mother Yashoda and are often four or five feet across and three or four feet deep. It has been said that the name of Mathura City has also been derived from this word *matha*.

How To Get There: This place is 2km south of Bhandiravana. It is 5km east of Belvan and lies 7km north of Vrindavana. (see map no. BM 84)

BM.73 **KRISHNA-KUNDA (Dangauli)**

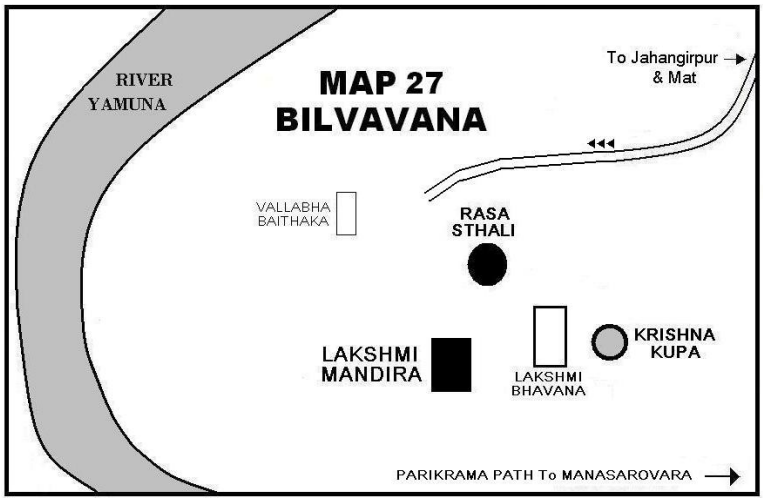
While herding cows in the forest of Bilvavana, it is said that the cowherd boys and the cows felt thirsty; therefore Krishna created this *kunda* just to satisfy their thirst. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, this *kunda* located in the village of Dangauli, is situated within the forest of Bilvavana.

How To Get There: This village is 2km south of Mat. (see map no. 26)

BM.74 **BILVAVANA (Belvana)**

This is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja and Bilvavana forest has an individual *parikrama* of around four kilometers. The name of Bilvavana, or Belvana as it is also known, is derived from of a large round fruit known as "*bilva* fruit', commonly called *'bael* fruit' that grows in great abundance in this forest. This fruit ripens in summer and once the hard shell is broken, the soft pulpy centre can be eaten raw or mixed with sugar and water and makes a very cooling drink in summer-time. This fruit is also used as a cure for stomach ailments. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"It was here that Balarama and Krishna ate ripe *bael* fruits. According to the *Adi-varaha Purana*, this forest is worshiped by all the demigods and whoever visits it will also be worshiped in Brahmaloka. In Bilvavana a man can be freed from his vices by bathing in Krishna-kunda."** Besides Krishna-kunda which is situated in Dangoli village, there is also the famous Lakshmi Mandira near the banks of the Yamuna, and a famous well said to have been created by Krishna known as Krishna-kupa. There is also a Shiva-*linga* said to have been worshiped by Parvati Devi, Lord Shiva's consort. According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, the sacred lake of Mana-sarovara, where Radharani hid Herself when overwhelmed by jealous anger or *mana*, is also situated in the Bilvavana forest.

How To Get There: This forest is 5km southwest of Mat and 1km north of Vrindavana if crossing the Yamuna by boat or pontoon. It is 5km from Vrindavana by road via Yamuna Bridge and Mana-sarovara. (see map no. 26 & 27)



The Story of Goddess Lakshmi and Her Penance at Bilvavana

This forest of Bilvavana is also known as Lakshmivana as well as Shrivana, because the goddess of fortune, Lakshmi Devi, who is also known as Shri Devi, came here to perform austerities in order to achieve the position of a *gopi* in Krishna's pastimes. One day, while serving Her husband Lord Vishnu in Vaikuntha, she heard from Shrila Narada Muni about Her husband's extraordinary pastimes when He appears on earth in His original form as Lord Shri Krishna in the transcendental land of Vrajabhumi in order to enjoy the most intimate loving pastimes with the *gopis*. Goddess Lakshmi Devi became so attracted by hearing the descriptions of the *rasa-lila* that she decided to go to Vrindavana and take part in those wonderful pastimes.

On arrival at the *rasa-mandala*, Lakshmi Devi was stopped from entering by some of the *gopis*, who told Her that She was not qualified or in the proper serving mood (*bhava*) to take part in the *rasa*-dance. Greatly disappointed to find that she was refused entry to the *rasa-mandala*, She became very sad and dejected. At that moment Krishna came there and after greeting the Goddess of Fortune with pleasing words, explained that she was stopped by the *gopis* because, as the wife of Lord Narayana, she was situated in the mood of *aishvarya-bhava*, being always surrounded with the great opulence of Vaikuntha. Krishna also informed Lakshmiji that even Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, Sukadeva Goswami, or the four Kumaras, besides many other great liberated souls, are not able to take part in the *rasa-lila* pastimes.

Feeling heartbroken at being rejected, Lakshmi Devi immediately returned to Vaikuntha to find out from Narada Muni why She could not take part in the *rasa-lila.* Shrila Narada Muni informed Lakshmiji, that in order to enter the *rasa-mandala,* one has to be free from any attachment to opulence, prestige, or personal satisfaction, and should desire only the absolute satisfaction of Krishna. Narada further said that the *rasa-lila* was the highest expression of unalloyed devotional service, and only the *gopis*, who had absolutely no interest in personal benefit, or even a pinch of selfish desire, who lived only to satisfy Krishna's desires, were properly qualified. Narada also explained that the *gopis* of Vrindavana abandoned everything for Krishna's pleasure, even their own husbands, their families, along with their chastity and honor, which so dear to ladies, and were even ready to sacrifice their very own lives, just to make Krishna happy. They never asked Krishna for anything, except to remain as eternal servants at His lotus feet.

Shrimati Lakshmi Devi had some attachment to the great opulence of Vaikuntha, as well as to Her position as the Goddess of Fortune and being the consort of Lord Narayana. She therefore asked Narada what She had to do to achieve the position of a *gopi*. Narada advised Her to perform austerities in the forests of Vrindavana in order to free Herself of all traces of attachment. Lakshmi Devi decided to stay in the forest of Bilvavana, because it lies on the northern bank of the Yamuna exactly opposite from Seva Kunja in Vrindavana, where the *rasa-lila* took place. Some say that Lakshmi Devi is still engaged in penance at Bilvavana even today, and a very famous festival is held here at the Lakshmiji Mandira every year during the month of *Pusa* (Nov-Dec), where thousands of people from all over Vraja flock there to get the mercy and blessings of goddess Laksmi Devi. The deity of Lakshmiji situated in the temple here is sitting in meditation with Her hands folded, so in this regard, She is still present here in Bilvavana in the form of Her deity and meditating on the *rasa-lila*.

It is also said that when Radharani came to know that Lakshmi Devi was undergoing penance at Bilvavana to become a *gopi*, She requested Krishna and His friends to secretly go there to build a simple shelter and also dig a well so that Lakshmiji would not have to suffer the elements and could easily get water without having to disturb Her penance. That well, which is opposite to the temple, became known as Krishna-kupa. The cowherd boys built a simple shelter for Lakshmiji out of thatched leaves. Standing next to the deity of Laksmiji in the temple one can see a deity of Krishna, offering flowers to Lakshmiji, who is deep in meditation and unaware of His presence.

In the Sri *Vraja-riti-cintamani* of Shrila Vishvanatha Chakravarti, are the following verses. **"When the personified Vedas saw the splendid good fortune of the *vraja-gopis*, they decided to follow in their footsteps and become *vraja-gopis* also. When Lakshmi Devi saw the charming sweetness of the *vraja-gopis*, she became bewildered and fainted with envy. Who can describe the transcendental opulence of this land of Vraja? There Lakshmi Devi performed severe austerities to become a *gopi*. Although she remained as Lakshmi and did not attain her goal, she nevertheless had the opportunity to speak to her beloved Krishna."**

BM.75 **MANA-SAROVARA**

The sacred lake of Mana-sarovara is the most tranquil place inhabited by a variety of water birds like ducks, herons, and cranes, and is said to be located within the sacred forest of Bilvavana. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara,* while discussing Bilvavana, it mentions that both

Krishna-kunda and Mana-sarovara are situated within the forest of Bilvavana. Some have said these places are within the sub-forest of Mathavana. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* further says that during the mid 16TH Century, the Yamuna River divided herself into two channels and the area around lake Mana-sarovara became an island situated in the middle of these two channels. Now the eastern channel has completely disappeared and only one channel remains.

Mana-sarovara actually means the 'lake of jealous anger' and is also known by other names like Radharani-mana-sarovara, as well as Pokhara Hridaya which means the 'lake of Radha's heart'. The local *Vrajavasis* call the lake simply as Radharani. The word *'mana'* pronounced as *'maana'* means a kind of 'jealous anger' or 'lovers pique', caused by being either slighted or neglected by one's sweetheart. This *mana* is often exhibited by Radharani when She sees Krishna talking or loitering with other *gopis,* especially if it happens to be Radha's arch rival and cousin, Chandravali.

It is said that once during the *rasa-lila* at Seva Kunja in Vrindavana, Radharani arrived a little late and when She entered the *rasa-mandala* She got a shock when She saw that Krishna was already dancing with some of the other *gopis*. Radharani felt completely devastated and being overwhelmed with jealousy and anger, immediately ran away from the *rasa-mandala*. With tears welling in Her eyes, Radharani came to this secluded spot and sitting under a bower, began to weep piteously. It is said that the torrent of Her tears eventually created a lake which became known as Mana-sarovara.

Realizing that Radharani had run away from the *rasa-mandala*, Krishna immediately started to search for Her; within a short time He arrived at the bower where Radha was hiding and He saw She was distraught and sobbing her heart out. Understanding that Her *mana* was very strong and feeling great remorse, Krishna lay prostrate on the ground before Her and placing His head at Her lotus feet, pleaded for forgiveness. Krishna then placed His flute at her lotus feet and begged Radharani to accept Him as one of Her servants. Seeing Krishna surrender Himself to Her in such a humble way, Radha's *mana* subsided and Her tears stopped. In the *Vraja-vilasa-stava* there is the following verse composed by Raghunatha Dasa Goswami. **"In order to increase the splendid and nectarean jealous love of Shrimati Radharani, who sometimes becomes proud of Her own good fortune, Lord Krishna briefly enjoys pastimes with other *gopis*, who blossom with many amorous desires."**

There is another story concerning this sacred lake which has become a part of Vrajavasi folk-law. Once, Lord Shiva had a deep desire to witness the *rasa-lila* performance of Radha and Krishna at Seva-kunja. However, when He arrived at the *rasa-mandala*, he was stopped by Lalita and Vishakha, who informed Him that although He was eligible to sit in a corner of the *rasa-mandala* to observe Krishna's dancing with the *gopis*, he would first have to bathe in the sacred lake of Mana-sarovara in order to obtain the body of a *gopi*, as no male other than Krishna could enter the *rasa-mandala*. After bathing in Mana-sarovara, Shiva obtained the body of a *gopi* and returned to the *rasa-mandala* where in his *gopi* form, he was greeted by Krishna who gave the new *gopi* the name Gopishwara, and said that from now on, Gopishwara should protect of the *gopis* and the *rasa-mandala*.

How To Get There: This place is 5km east of Bilvavan and 3km east of Vrindavana, on the road to Mat going over the Yamuna bridge. (see map no. 26)

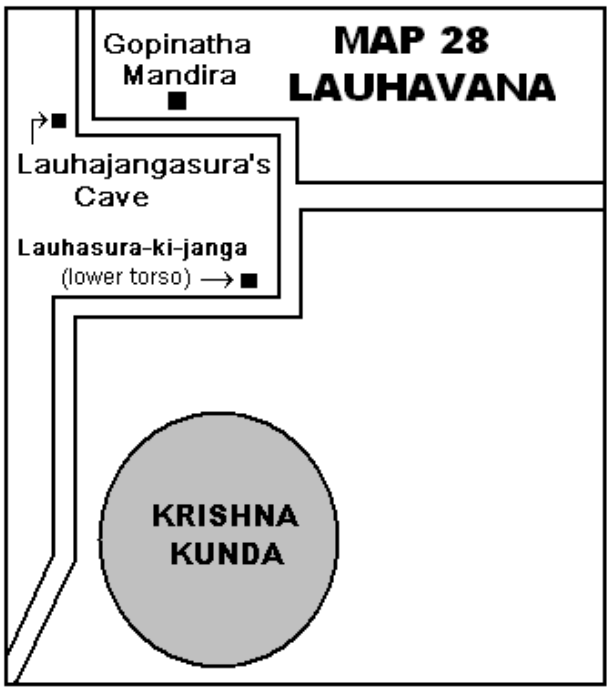
BM.76 **PANIGAON**

During the days of Krishna's pastimes, the River Yamuna completely encircled Vrindavana on three sides and its course ran past such places as Dhira Samira, Pani Ghata, Adi-bhadri Ghata, Raja Ghata and Akrura Ghata. On the western bank of the Yamuna there was a famous riverside crossing known as Pani Ghata, and on the other side of the river was a village named Panigaon, where it is said Durvasa Muni had an *ashrama*. On the occasion of *ekadashi*, the famous sage was observing a fast at Panigaon and was thinking from where to obtain *Bhagavata-prashadam* for breaking his fast the next day. Understanding the mind of the great sage, Krishna encouraged Radharani and the *gopis* to prepare a wonderful feast and carry it in pots to Panigaon. Krishna informed the *gopis* that if they sumptuously fed the

great sage Durvasa Muni, he would certainly be very pleased and give his special blessings to all of them.

On Krishna's advice, Radharani with the help of the *gopis* prepared a wonderful feast and then made their way to Panigaon. When they arrived at Pani Ghata there were no boats to carry them across the river, but then they remembered Krishna's words, therefore the *gopis* prayed to Yamuna Devi by saying. "Dear Yamunaji, on the strength of Krishna being a strict *brahmachari*, kindly let us cross." Hearing the words of the *gopis,* and knowing full well that Krishna's relationship with the *gopis* was not born out of lust or sexual desire, but out of *prema* or pure transcendental love, Yamuna Devi immediately revealed a shallow path through the water to the other side. Arriving at Panigaon, the *gopis* humbly greeted Durvasa Muni, who was overwhelmed by their kindness in bringing such a sumptuous feast of *Bhagavata-prashadam* for him to break his *ekadashi* fast. After relishing all the wonderful preparations, Durvasa gave his benediction to the *gopis* that all of their desires would be fulfilled. Durvasa also gave a special boon to Radharani, that whoever was fortunate enough to eat Her cooking, would never become sick and would achieve a very long life.

How To Get There: This place is 2km south of Mana-sarovara and 3km east of Vrindavana via the road that goes to Mat. (see map no. 26)



BM.77 **LAUHAVANA (Lohban)**

Lauhavana is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja which the *Puranas* say, is a place where all vices can be destroyed. The forest of Lauhavana, also called Lauhajangavana, was especially well known for the many varieties of aromatic flowers that formerly grew there that created a wonderful fragrance throughout the entire forest. Lauhavana has an individual *parikrama* of about four kilometers, although hardly any trees remain of the vast forest that once stood here. The *Adi-varaha Purana* says that at one time this forest fell under the control of a demon named Lauhajangha, also known as Lohasura; therefore the forest became known as Lauhajanghavana and formerly covered both banks of the Yamuna. The fact that the Lauhajanga demon live here is also confirmed in the *Gopala-tapani Upanishad*. It is also believed that Lauhavana was the site where Krishna defeated the army of Jarasandha eighteen times. The forest is also called Lohavana as well as Loban.

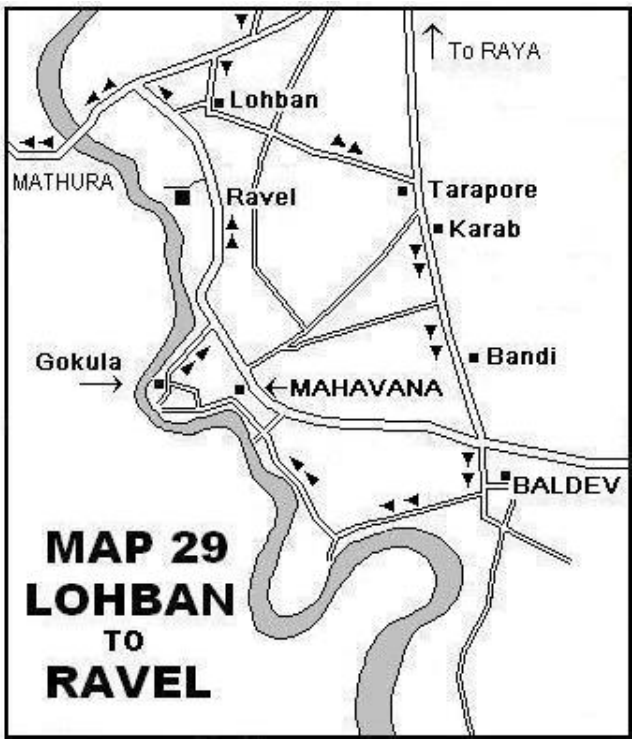
Lauhajangavana was one of the forests where Krishna and Balarama would graze Their cows and where They enjoyed playing water sports in the company of their cowherd boyfriends in the lake known as Krishna-kunda. During the course of His pastimes here, the *Bhakti-ratnakara* says that Krishna slew the demon Lauhajanghasura and rid the forest of his menace forever. The places of interest here are the celebrated Krishna-kunda, the ancient Gopinatha Mandira, and the Lauhajangha Gufa, or cave where the demon supposedly lived and which is said to have gone underground for many miles. One can also see what is believed by locals to be the lower part of the demon's body, after it was cut in half by Krishna. Local *panditas* say that when the demon was cut in two, the upper part went to heaven while the lower part, which was made of iron, remained on earth, and which locals now worship as an expansion of Shanideva, the demigod of the planet Saturn. The word *'lauhajanga'* means that the demons 'thighs' *(janga)* were made off 'iron' *(loha),* or that his thighs were as strong as iron. There is a sandstone rock which supposedly represents Lauhajanga's lower torso and thighs, which is worshiped with all the paraphernalia used in the worship Shanideva (Saturn).

How To Get There: This forest is 5km south of Panigaon and 6km east of Mathura. (See map no. 26 & 28)

Krishna's Boating Pastimes at Lauhavana

The *Bhakti-ratnakara* mentions that the place where the Yamuna River passes through the Lauhavana forest is the spot where Krishna's *nauka-vihara* pastimes were enacted. The word *'nauka'* means a 'boat' and *'vihara'* means 'ambrosial pastimes'. This pastime is also mentioned in the *Padyavali* of Shrila Rupa Goswami. One day, the *gopis* came here to the banks of the Yamuna carrying vessels full of milk products that they were taking to the market on the other side of the Yamuna. On arrival, the *gopis* saw that there were no boats to carry them across the river, accept an old and dilapidated boat owned by Krishna, who was lying inside it pretending to be unconcerned and fast asleep. Actually, Krishna had been secretly waiting for the beautiful *gopis* to arrive so He could carry them in His boat across the river and enjoy some fun. Seeing Krishna lying in the boat, Radharani called His name but at first He could not be woken. After much cajoling, Krishna eventually woke up and eventually agreed to take the *gopis* in His boat to the other side of the Yamuna.

As they made their way across the river the weather suddenly changed and as the wind started to blow, the water became choppy and dangerous. As the boat began to rock from side to side, it also began filling with water due to a hole that suddenly appeared in the floor of the boat. Krishna advised the *gopis* that in order to save the boat from immediately sinking, they should throw all their heavy vessels containing milk products overboard. Thus, on Krishna's advice, the *gopis* immediately threw all their vessels into the river. When that did not have the desired effect and the boat still appeared to be sinking, Krishna advised the *gopis* to remove all their heavy jewelry, including their solid gold necklaces, bangles, and rings, and throw that overboard also, which they also immediately did. Radharani anxiously told Krishna, "This boat is broken and the river is very deep here. We are only young girls and the situation is not in our favor. If we survive at all, it is because You are our boatman. On your suggestion, we have thrown away all our vessels and all our jewelry, yet the other bank is not even in sight. This boat is filling with water and at any moment it will sink being caught in a stormy whirlpool. Alas, what an unforeseen calamity! Despite this, You are clapping joyfully. My hands cannot stop the work of bailing out the water from the boat and You cannot stop making jokes. O Krishna, if I save myself this time, I will never again set foot in your boat." The boat however managed to reach the shore and the *gopis*, although bereft of all their milk products and jewelry, were just happy to have been saved, while Krishna was feeling the greatest ecstasy due to His transcendental boating pastimes with the *gopis* at Lauhavana.



BM.78 **VANDI ANANDI (Bandi)**

This is the celebrated village where two very devoted ladies once lived, whose names were Vandi and Anandi. These two female devotees were always immersed in thinking about Krishna's pastimes. Every day they left their village and went to Nanda Maharaja's house at Gokula on the pretext of helping to make cow-dung patties for cooking, but in fact they spent the whole day helping mother Yashoda take care of Krishna. These two ladies were actually expansions of Yogamaya Devi and represent two different aspects of the goddess.

The famous temple in the village is known as the Yogamaya Mandira, and contains the two ancient deities of Vandi and Anandi, seen here in their forms as Durga Devi, which are said to have been installed by King Vajranabha. During the course of time, these deities were lost for a very long period but were rediscovered at the bottom of the nearby *kunda* when it was being cleaned about hundred or so years ago. The large *kunda* next to the temple where the deities were found is known as Vandi Anandi-kunda. During the Greco-Bactrian and Saka invasions of India beginning around 150 BC., many deities were hidden in lakes and *kundas* to avoid them being stolen or destroyed by the invading armies who also captured Mathura. By the turn of the 1ST Century, another invading horde known as the Kushans defeated the Sakas and gradually gained control over most of Northern India and the city of Mathura also fell under their control. This dark period in Indian history brought about the decline of *Bhagavata Dharma* and many of the famous deities established by Vajranabha were hidden for fear they would be desecrated.

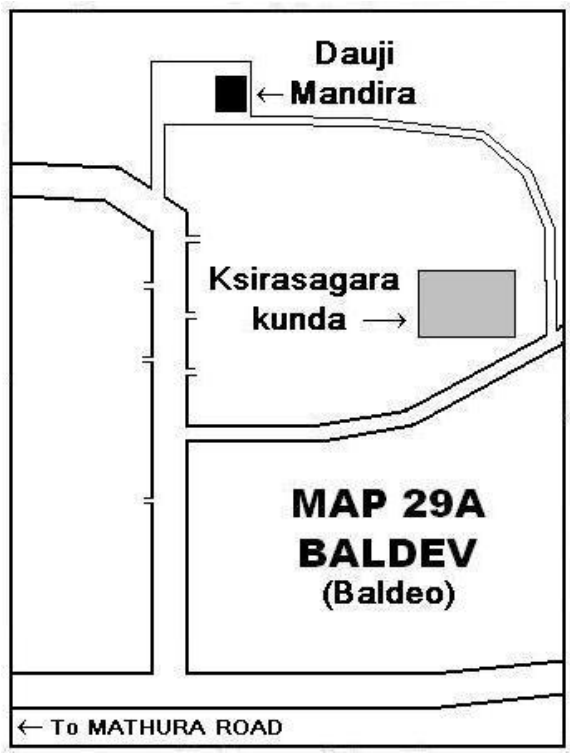
It is said that these two very beautiful deities were carved out off the same black stone known as Vraja-*shila*, from which Vajranabha had the deity of Baladeva (Dauji), and many other deities carved from. The exquisite beauty of these two deities of Vandi and Anandi can only be fully appreciated in the early morning hours after *mangala-arati*, just prior to them being decorated. The elaborately sculptured form of Vandi Devi, whose full name is Vinandi Devi, can be seen displaying ten arms holding her various weapons in her feature as Durga, riding on her tiger carrier and slaying the invincible demon Mahishasura, who is seen in the form of a buffalo. The ten-armed form of Durga is generally associated with her fierce feature of Bhadrakali, the consort of Rudra, who, having received all the

weapons of the demigods, killed the king of demon Mahisasura, who possessed the form of a human being as well as a buffalo.

How To Get There: This village lies 10km southwest of Lohavana on the *parikrama* route and 4km north of Baldev. (see map no. 29)

BM.79 **DAUJI (Baldev)**

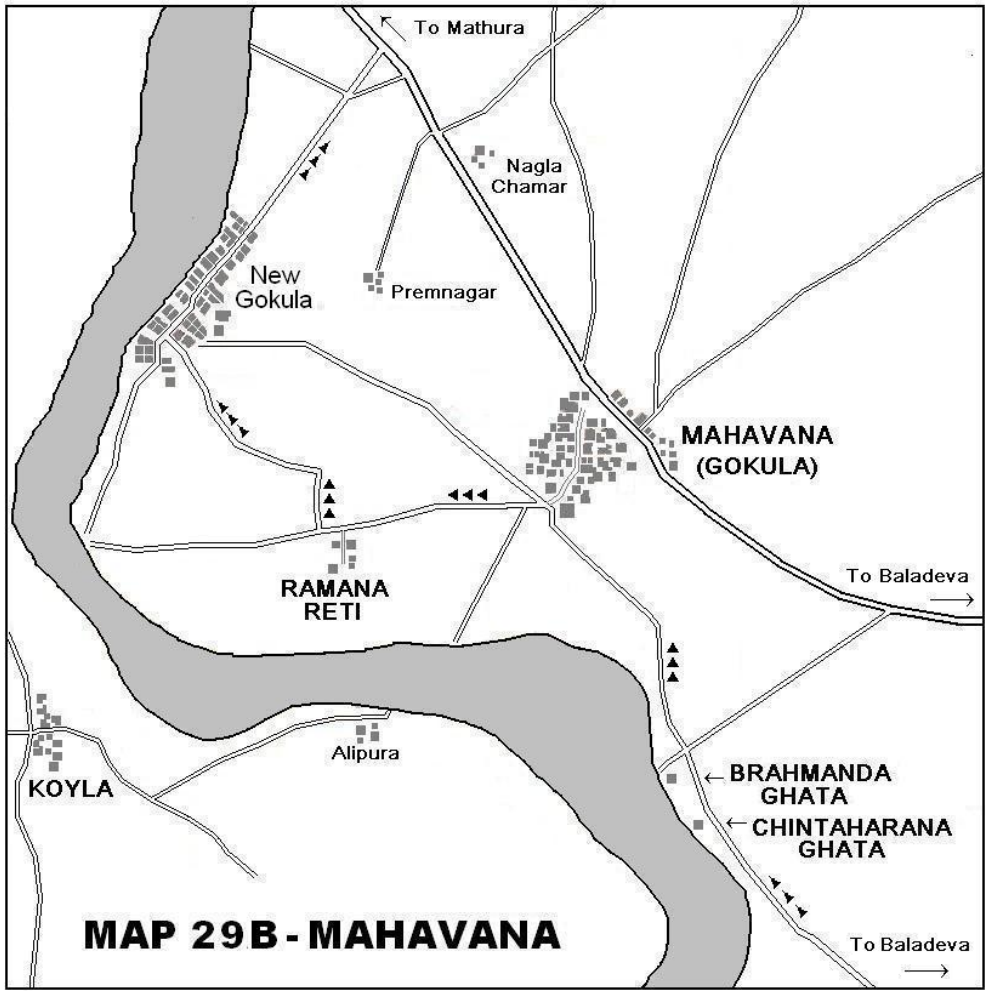
Here one can see the largest and most famous deity of Lord Balarama in the whole of Vraja, who is known affectionately as Dauji, which means Krishna's elder brother. The deity is almost seven feet tall and was installed by Vajranabha Maharaja. It is said that once Balarama (Dauji), while herding cows at this place and showed His original form as the Supreme Personality of Godhead to the cowherd boys, therefore Vajranabha established the deity of Dauji here as the presiding deity of the eastern petal of the lotus of Vraja. Sometimes Dauji is mentioned as being the presiding deity of the southern petal, but this post is also credited to Lord Varaha, who resides at the southern-most tip of Vraja at Saukari-Vateshwara (Batasar). This temple of Dauji marks the most southerly point on the Vraja Mandala Parikrama route. The *Puranas* say that Baldev is also one of the famous *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vraja.



In the course of time, the deity of Dauji was lost and probably hidden during the period of the Greco-Bactrian, Saka, and Kushan invasions of India that began around 150 BC. It is most likely that all the prominent deities of Vrindavana Dhama were hidden in *kundas* or buried underground during this period including; Govindaji, Gopinathaji, Madana-mohana. The city of Mathura fell under the control of the invading armies and by the the turn of the 1ST Century became their southern capital of the Kushan Empire. The Kushans, who were Turko-Iranians, are originally believed to have been Zoroastrians, but soon converted to Buddhism and under the leadership of Kushan kings like Kanishka, Vasishka, Huvishka, and Rajulu, Buddhism became the most prominent religion in Northern India for the next seven hundred years. During their rule, Mathura was converted into one of the most important places of Buddhist culture and learning in the whole of India.

The deity of Dauji had not yet been rediscovered during the time of Lord Chaitanya or the Six Goswamis, but was discovered around one hundred and fifty years later, lying at the bottom of an ancient *kunda* in the town of Baldev (Baldeo). During the re-installation ceremony of the deity, it is said that the local residents poured milk from a hundred thousand cows into the *kunda* where Dauji was found, as an offering to the deity. The *kunda* then became celebrated as Ksirasagara-kunda, which means the *kunda* containing the 'ocean of milk'. This same *kunda* is also called Sankarshana-kunda, which is another name of Lord Balarama. In the temple, the deity of Dauji or Lord Balarama can be seen holding a cup of *varuni-rasa* in His left hand. Hidden to the side of Lord Balarama is the Lord'a eternal consort Revati Devi, who is visible from just one side of the alter doorway, probably because her deity was installed at a later date sometime after the temple was built.

How To Get There: This place is 4km south of Bandi and 25km southeast of Mathura. (see map no. 29)



BM80 **CHINTAHARANA GHATA**

There is a famous Shiva-*linga* located at this *ghata* known as Chinteshwara Mahadeva, that is said to have been made from ten thousand smaller *lingas* all fused together. There is also a temple commemorating the famous pastime at this *ghata*, where a deity of mother Yashoda can be seen holding baby Krishna in her arms. It is said that Lord Shiva once came to Gokula desiring to have *darshana* of baby Krishna, but was refused and

turned away by the elderly *gopis*. This was due to his half naked and esoteric appearance, with his disheveled and matted locks, his garland of human skulls, snakes wrapped around his arms and neck, and covered from head to foot in ash. Not wishing to disturb them, Lord Shiva came instead to this *ghata* and sat in meditation on Krishna's pastimes.

After Krishna ate clay at Brahmanda Ghata, and mother Yashoda had seen the vision of the entire *brahmand*a or universe within Krishna's mouth, she became perplexed, as well as anxious for the well-being of her unusual son. She therefore took Krishna in her arms and came to this *ghata*, having heard that a *tantric* yogi was in meditation there, hoping that the *tantric* could cast a spell or chant some mantras to save her child from any further disturbances or unusual happenings. Lord Shiva was very happy to be able to have *darshana* of baby Krishna and informed mother Yashoda that she should no longer be in anxiety regarding her son, as nothing bad was going to happen and the child would not be harmed. Mother Yashoda felt great relief at the words of the *tantric*. The word *'chinta'* means 'anxiety' and the word *'harana'* means 'to remove' or 'take away'. Therefore, at this celebrated *ghata*, mother Yashoda's great anxiety about the welfare of her child was completely removed by the grace of Lord Shiva.

How To Get There: This *ghata* is 6km west of Baldev and 2km south of Mahavana village on the road from Baldeva Town. (see map no. 29A)

BM.81 **BRAHMANDA GHATA**

This is a very famous *ghata* that has been glorified throughout the Vedic literatures as well as innumerable songs and poems of the Vaishnava saints. This pastime at Brahmanda Ghata reveals Krishna to be a small helpless child in the care of his mother, while simultaneously being the Supreme Creator of the entire universe. In regard to this pastime, the word *'brahmanda'* refers to the 'material universe', as well as to Krishna's 'universal form'.

One day, when Krishna and Balarama were playing with their friends by the sacred banks of the Yamuna, some of the boys accused Krishna of eating clay. Even Balarama supported the boys and said He that had eaten clay. Krishna however denied this, but nevertheless some of the boys ran off to tell mother Yashoda that Krishna had eaten clay. Mother Yashoda came immediately to chastise Krishna for His naughty behavior, if indeed He had eaten clay as the boys had claimed. Krishna denied before His mother that He had eaten clay and complained against the other boys, saying that for some reason they were not happy with Him, perhaps having lost in some game, and had therefore lodged a false complaint. Krishna informed mother Yashoda that if she cared to look inside His mouth, she could see for herself whether He had eaten clay or not.

Mother Yashoda agreed to this proposal and when Krishna opened His mouth, she looked inside. To her utter astonishment she saw the gigantic universal form including the whole cosmic manifestation with all its divisions of planets and shining stars, the sun and moon, the total material elements, eternal time, outer space, all the great mountains and rivers, the demigods, the living entities, and she could also see herself, with Krishna sitting on her lap drinking her breast milk. Yashoda was totally bewildered by what she saw in Krishna's mouth, and began to wonder whether she was dreaming or seeing some play of the illusionary energy, or was it some kind of mystic power being displayed by her unusual child. She then began philosophizing in various ways about how she was under the illusion of the bodily concept, thinking King Nanda of the cowherd men to be her husband and Krishna to be her son, and all the wealth and riches within Nanda's kingdom to be her property. At that moment Krishna expanded His internal *yogamaya* potency and mother Yashoda immediately forgot about all the weighty philosophical thoughts she was having, and seeing her darling little Krishna sitting before her, took Him on to her lap and once again became overcome in the ecstasy of motherly affection.

How To Get There: This *ghata* is 1km southwest of Mahavana Village (see map no. 29A)

BM.82 **GOKULA (Mahavana)**

Mahavana is one of the twelve sacred forests of Vraja and although it was once a large and verdant forest with a *parikrama* of around twelve kilometers, there are hardly any trees remaining there today. Mahavana was the second largest forest after Kamyavana and the name Mahavana means 'great forest'. Nevertheless, one can still see all the places where Krishna enjoyed His transcendental pastimes during His early childhood (*kaumara-lila*) at Gokula. The ancient village of Gokula, which is presently known as Mahavana, is the original village named Gokula where Nanda Maharaja and Yashoda Mayi had their residence and where Krishna spent the first three and a half years of His childhood. The name 'Gokula' actually means the residential place of cows. The word *'go'* means 'cow' and *'kula'* means 'residence' or 'living place', or in other words Gokula was a village inhabited by cowherd men and their cows.

Krishna's childhood pastimes at Gokula are in particular very sweet, and more easily understood by the ordinary people in general. Krishna's pastimes of stealing butter and yogurt from the houses of the married *gopis*, and then feeding that same stolen butter and yogurt to His friends and also the monkeys, or His letting loose the *gopis* calves so they would drank all the cow's milk, or His slaying of so many demons, are just some of Krishna's many childhood pastimes that can be appreciated by people of all ages. On the other hand, Krishna's amorous pastimes with the young *gopis* of Vraja are not so easily understood, even by greatly learned scholars, philosophers, and pious religionists.

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu also visited Mahavana while on His *parikrama* around the sacred forests of Vraja. It is said that He experienced great transcendental ecstasy seeing all the wonderful places in Gokula connected to Krishna's pastimes. Lord Chaitanya visited the Chaurasi Khambha, also called Nanda Bhavan, where Krishna's birth celebrations took place. It is said that Lord Chaitanya's ecstasy increased even more when He saw the twin *arjuna* trees broken by Krishna, which was the site of the Damodara-*lila*, where mother Yashoda tied her naughty son Krishna to a grinding mortar. During His tour of Gokula, Lord Chaitanya chanted the holy names and danced in ecstasy wherever He went, people gathered from far and wide to get a glimpse of Lord Chaitanya, and all those who saw Him also experienced ecstatic and many also fainted on the ground. The local *Vrajavasis* were saying that Krishna has again appeared in Vrindavana in the form of a sannyasi.

How To Get There: This village is 24km by road southeast of Mathura on the Baldev road and 10km northwest of Baldev town. It is 2km north of Chintaharana Ghata. (see map no. 29A & 30)

(One should take note that the modern town now called Gokula, a few kilometers west of Mahavana village, is not the original Gokula as some persons fraudulently claim. The recently built town of Gokula did not even exist at the time of Lord Chaitanya or the Six Goswamis)

Places of Interest At Mahavana

M.1 Chaurasi Khambha / Nanda Bhavan

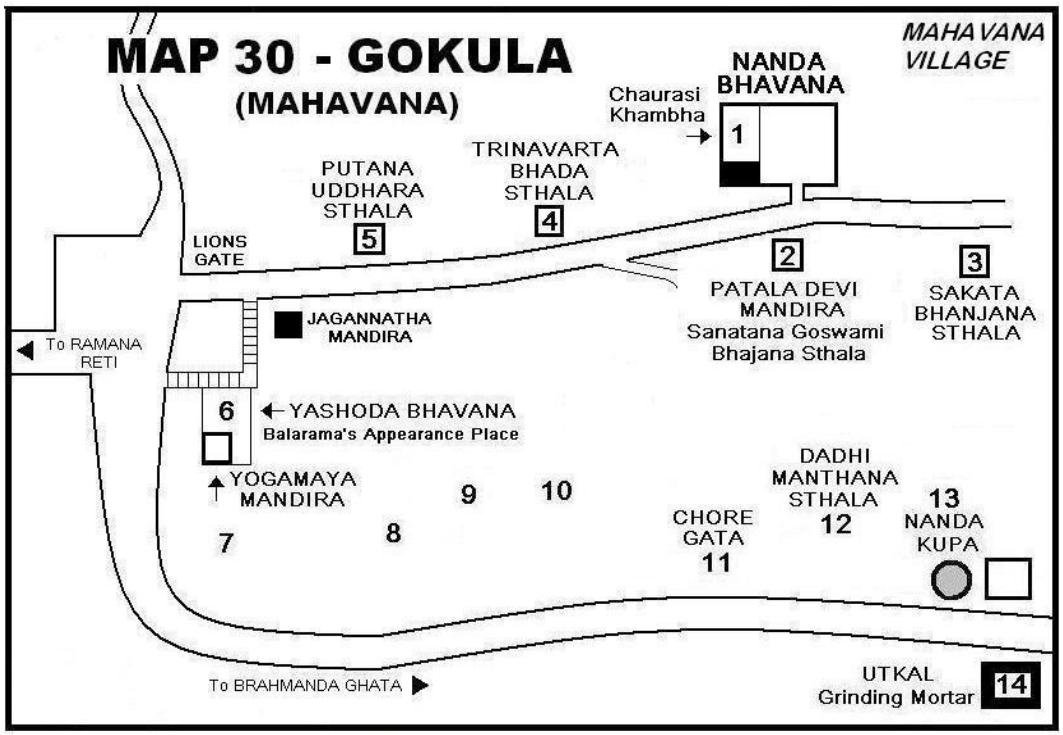
Situated on top of a small hill known as Nanda Tila, is the famous Chaurasi Khambha, which is said to have been built by the celestial engineer Vishvakarma for the benefit of Krishna's father Nanda Maharaja, the king of the cowherd men. The name 'Chaurasi Kambha' means 'eighty four pillars' and this kind of building, besides being an opulent status symbol with its intricately carved stone pillars, was generally used as a durbar or assembly hall, where the king would meet his ministers and subjects. This is the most important archeological remains of Krishna's childhood pastimes at Gokula and is also known as the Nanda Bhavan, and it would have been an important part of Nanda's palace complex. The word *bhavan* generally means a large palatial residence or place for guests and visitors. A great festival to celebrate Krishna's birth was held at Nanda Bhavan where Nanda Maharaja freely distributed immense wealth and thousands of cows to the *brahmanas*.

Buildings or pillars made from solid rock are almost indestructible and can survive the ravages of time just the same as natural rocks, which could last even millions of years. The Chaurasi Khambha is now used as a temple containing the deity of baby Krishna lying in a swinging cradle, with the deities of Nanda and Yashoda standing behind with Balarama in-between them. In the courtyard there is an ancient *pipal* tree or *asvata-vriksa*, which is

believed to be a wish-fulfilling *kalpavriksha* tree. This unusual tree is said to produces five different colored flowers or blossoms during the year and is said to have been here since

Krishna's time. There are a number of other shrines in the courtyard including one dedicated to Lord Balarama.

How To Get There: Anand Bhavana is on the top of the hill at Mahavana Village. (see map no. 30)



M.2 **Sanatana Goswami Gufa and Bhajana-sthala / Patala Devi Mandira**

Just opposite from Nanda Bhavana is an underground cave where Shrila Sanatana Goswami lived and performed *bhajana* during the time he stayed at Gokula. The cave is said to go underground for about thirty feet. One day Sanatana discovered a small deity of Yogamaya Devi in her form as Durga, deep within the cave which he named as Patala Devi, which is a name of the goddess Durga. He then began to worship this deity and many years later the cave entrance was excavated and made larger with a temple being built on the spot. Now, besides the original deity found by Sanatana, there is a much larger deity of Patala Devi or Durga, and the part of the cave that went underground has now been sealed.

According to the *Bhakti-ratnakara*, one day Sanatana was chanting on his beads near to where Krishna and Balarama played in the sand on the bank of the Yamuna, known as Ramanaka, and now called Ramana Reti, when he noticed some children playing nearby. He was particularly attracted by one very beautiful and charming little cowherd boy. After observing the boy for some time, Sanatana felt convinced that this was not an ordinary boy, but could be Krishna Himself, enjoying childhood games with the local cowherd boys. When the children stopped playing and went home, in order to clear his doubt, Sanatana followed this unusual little boy just to see where he was living. When the boy went inside a nearby temple, Sanatana also went inside, but to his surprise found himself alone inside a temple, with the little boy nowhere in sight, as if he had completely vanished. The only other person inside the temple was a deity of Madana-gopala. Sanatana immediately bowed down before the deity and without uttering a word to anyone, and in a deep mood of contemplation, returned to his cave near Nanda Bhavan. The *Bhakti-ratnakara* also says that Sanatana

Goswami went every day to have *darshana* of Madana-gopala, whom he used to call Madana-mohana, due to the deities most bewildering (*mohana*) and inconceivable pastimes

It is also said that when Lord Chaitanya visited Mahavana during His Vraja Mandala Parikrama, He also went to the temple of Madana-gopala and felt great ecstasy while looking at the deity. Lord Nityananda also had *darshana* of Madana-gopala some years earlier when He also came on *parikrama* to Gokula. The exact location of this temple is at the present time not clear. The only known temple of a similar name in the area is the Gopala Mandira at Gopala Ghata on the bank of the River Yamuna, about half a kilometer west of Mahavana. According to the ancient records called *Sevya-prakatya*, Sanatana Goswami obtained this deity of Madana-gopala as a gift from Parashurama Choube, a resident of Mahavana in 1534, after which Sanatana took the deity to Vrindavana where he installed Him on top of the hill called Dwadashditya Tila and later built a temple there called the Madana-mohana Mandira.

How To Get There: This place is opposite Nanda Bhavan. (see map no. 30)

M.3 **Sakata-bhanjana-sthana**

This is where Krishna killed the demon Sakatasura, who by his mystic power, had entered into a large hand-cart with the intention of crushing baby Krishna to death. The word '*sakata'* generally means a 'bullock-cart', but the *Bhagavatam* says it was a large hand-pulled cart and from descriptions found in the *Gopala-champu* it was of an enormous size and very heavy. It was Krishna's first birthday and the celebrations had just finished. As baby Krishna seemed to be getting very sleepy, mother Yashoda placed her baby on His back under a hand-cart for safety, while she attended to some of the guests. One of King Kamsa's evil servants named Sakatasura had come there to kill Krishna and by his mystic power, he had entered the large and heavy hand-cart in order to make it collapse on top of baby Krishna and thus kill Him. At that moment, feeling hungry and impatient to drink His mother's milk, Krishna suddenly kicked the cart and smashed it to pieces and simultaneously killed the Sakatasura demon. On hearing the sound of the hand cart being broken, mother Yashoda immediately came running to the spot along with all the *Vrajavasis*, and was extremely happy that her darling little baby was unharmed. The word *'bhanjana-sthana'* means the 'place of elimination' where the Sakatasura demon was liberated. According to the *Adi-varaha Purana* the Sakatasura demon was killed near Yashoda Mayi's kitchen located in the vicinity of the Yamalarjuna-bhanjana tirtha.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.4 **Trinavarta-badha-sthala**

This is the place where the whirlwind demon named Trinavarta was killed by baby Krishna. Trinavarta was a servant and friend of King Kamsa and arrived in Gokula in the mystical form of a powerful whirlwind. His intention was to carry baby Krishna high into the sky and then throw Him down on the ground in order to kill him. Mother Yashoda was holding Krishna on her lap when He suddenly became much too heavy to hold and therefore Yashoda placed Him on the ground. All of a sudden the whirlwind demon arrived and created a huge dust storm that obliterated everyone's view. With his strong gusts of wind, the demon scooped Krishna up from the ground where He was sitting and carried Him high into the sky. Yashoda Mayi and the other ladies came running when they realized that Krishna had been carried away by the whirlwind. Meanwhile Krishna was actually enjoying the ride on the demon's shoulders and was appreciating the wonderful view from the air of Vraja, with all its hills, forests, lakes, and pasturing grounds.

As the Trinavarta demon went high into the sky, Krishna grabbed him tightly around the neck and the demon began to experience a choking sensation. It suddenly felt to the demon that he was carrying a great mountain instead of a baby as Krishna seemed to be getting heavier by the moment. Due to Krishna's ever-increasing weight and with his breathing dislocated, the whirlwind demon's eyes began to bulge from their sockets and after losing power, he suddenly came crashing down to the ground with an almighty thud and died on the spot. Mother Yashoda immediately came running with all the other ladies of the palace and was greatly relieved to see that their darling Krishna was sitting completely

unharmed on top of the demon's dead body. There is now a small temple here dedicated to this pastime known as Trinavarta-bihari Mandira. The word *'badha-sthala'* means 'the place where Trinavarta was killed'.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.5 **Putana-udhara-sthala**

The word *'udhara-sthala'* means the place where Putana was 'liberated' and this is the site where the witch Putana was killed by baby Krishna and received liberation. In her previous life, Putana had been the sister of Bali Maharaja whose name was Ratnamala. When Lord Vamanadeva appeared before Bali Maharaja in the form of a young and handsome little *brahmachari*, to beg alms from King Bali Maharaja, Ratnamala was overcome with motherly affection and desired to cuddle Vamanadeva in her arms and feed him with her breast milk. But when Vamanadeva arrested her brother Bali and bound him up with ropes like a common criminal, Ratnamala became furious with Vamanadeva. At that moment, Ratnamala's mind changed and instead of wanting to give Vamanadeva milk from her breasts, she instead wanted to smear her breasts with poison to kill Him. Understanding the mind of Ratnamala, who was born into the dynasty of demons, but whose grandfather was the great devotee Prahlada Maharaja, Lord Vamanadeva, in order to nurture Ratnamala's spark of devotion, decided to fulfill her maternal desire to feed Him breast milk, and therefore in her next life she took birth as Putana, and by the grace of the Lord, all her desires were fulfilled.

The witch Putana was a friend and servant of King Kamsa, and had been ordered to go to Gokula and administer poison to every new-born baby in the village; just to be certain that the eighth child born of Devaki would also be killed. Going from house to house administering poison to every newborn child, the witch Putana soon arrived in the courtyard of Nanda's palace. By her mystic power she was able to disguise her hideous witch-like form and assumed the appearance of a very beautiful young woman. When she entered the house, all the ladies present including mother Yashoda, were struck with wonder at the exquisite beauty of the visitor and thought that she must be a noble lady or even a goddess, who had come to have *darshana* of their darling little Krishna.

The witch Putana then placed baby Krishna on her lap and uncovering her breasts, offered her milk to Krishna. Unknown to mother Yashoda and the other ladies, Putana's breasts were smeared with a deadly poison. When Putana pushed her poisonous nipple into Krishna's mouth, He accepted it as motherly affection, but at the same time knew that she had already killed many innocent babies and that her intention was also to kill Him. As baby Krishna sucked the milk from Putana's breast, he also sucked out her very life air. Suddenly feeling the excruciating pain of death, Putana suddenly began screaming and tried to stop Krishna from sucking her breast, but it was too late. As Putana was dying, she assumed her real form as a gigantic and grotesque looking witch, and fell to the ground dead. It is described that as Putana the witch was falling down, her body expanded up to twelve miles long with her head reaching as far as the village of Kaccheri, on the other side of the Yamuna near Bahulavana. It has also been said that as she was falling, Krishna caused her to fall outside of Gokula, so that none of the residents would get hurt. Because Putana had offered her breast milk to Krishna, by His inconceivable mercy, He accepted it as motherly affection and Putana was awarded the liberation of becoming one of Krishna's mothers (nurse) in her next life.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.6 **Yashoda Bhavan / Yogamaya Mandira**

Yashoda Bhavan was situated a short distance from Nanda Bhavan across what was once an open courtyard within King Nanda's palatial compound. It is said that this *bhavan* was Yashoda Mayi's private quarters and is the place where Balarama was born from the womb of mother Rohini, eight days before Krishna took birth. Actually, Balarama had originally appeared in the womb of Devaki as her seventh son, after the first six had been slain by Kamsa. By the will of providence, Balarama was transferred through the agency of

the *yogamaya* potency to the womb of Rohini, the second wife of Vasudeva, who lived in Nanda's house at Gokula along with her friend Yashoda. King Kamsa believed that the seventh pregnancy of Devaki had ended in a miscarriage. It is said that Balarama remained in the womb of Rohini for fourteen months before being born. There is a small temple within Yashoda Bhavan containing the deities of Balarama's mother and father, Vasudeva and Rohini, along with their baby Balarama.

Most authorities believe that Yogamaya Devi, also known by the name Ekanamsa devi, was also born here at Yasoda Bhavan from the womb of Yasoda Mayi, and this is the actual place where Vasudeva brought Krishna and exchanged Him for Yogamaya. The evidence being that a temple of Yogamaya was also established here to commemorate her birth. It is also said that Krishna's umbilical cord was also cut here, thus giving further credence to it being the private rooms where the ladies of Nanda's house, like Rohini and Yashoda, gave birth to their children. Mother Yashoda also performed Shasti-*puja* here on the sixth day after delivery for the well-being of her new-born son.

Another secret revealed by Shrila Jiva Goswami and supported by other Vaishnava *acharyas*, is that Krishna actually appeared simultaneously as the son of Devaki in Kamsa's jail in Mathura, and also from the womb of Yashoda Mayi in Gokula. It is said that Krishna appeared in His Narayana feature with four arms in Mathura, but in Gokula He appeared in His original two armed form of Govinda, along with His twin sister Ekanamsa or Yogamaya Devi, but remained unseen being covered by the mystical *yogamaya* potency. When Vasudeva brought baby Krishna to Gokula, the four armed Vishnu feature, by the arrangement of the *yogamaya* potency merged with Krishna's original two armed form of Govinda, Vasudeva then removed Krishna's twin sister Yogamaya and brought her back to the prison cell in Mathura. When Kamsa arrived to kill the new-born child, Yogamaya Devi assumed her eight-armed form of Durga Devi, and after chastising Kamsa, flew into the air and disappeared from sight. The Vishnu form that merged into Krishna's *svayama-rupa* form of Govinda is the form that protects Krishna and suddenly manifests when Krishna has to kill demons. This is because Krishna, in His original *svayama-rupa* form of Govinda, the friend of the cows, does not engage in killing any demons nor does He carry any weapons, but instead carries only a flute and a buffalo horn.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.7 **Danta-dhavana Tila**

On top of this small hill (*tila*) near to Nanda ki Haveli, is the spot where Nanda maharaja would go every morning and use a twig to clean his teeth (*danta-dhavana*). The word '*danta'* means teeth and '*dhavana'* means 'cleaning'.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.8 **Nanda ki Haveli**

This is the site near Yasoda Bhavan where it is said Nanda Maharaja and his brothers had their private residential quarters. The word *'haveli'* means a 'large residence' with many rooms where a number of generations belonging to the same family live together, in what is generally termed as a 'joint family'. Therefore, 'Nanda ki Haveli' means 'Nanda's House'.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.9 **Malla Tirtha**

This is where Krishna and Balarama enjoyed wrestling with one-another. The word *'malla'* means a 'wrestler'. There is now a temple of Gopishwara Mahadeva at this spot.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.10 **Nanda's Goshala**

It was here at Nanda's *goshal*a that the name giving ceremony of Krishna and Balarama was performed in secret by Gargamuni. This was due to the fear of further

reprisals by Kamsa if he got some idea that the eighth child of Devaki was still alive and living in Gokula. It was here in Nanda's *goshala* that Gargamuni made his prophesies regarding Krishna's present and past lives and also revealed before Nanda Baba, that his extraordinary son was in fact the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as well as the eternal consort of Shrimati Radharani. Due to the *yogamaya* potency, Nanda Maharaja forgot what Gargamuni had said, that his son was in fact the Supreme Lord.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.11 **Chore Ghata**

The word *'chore'* means 'thief' and when Vasudeva brought Krishna to Gokula and took away Yogamaya Devi, it is said he came and went secretly just like a thief, and therefore this incline near Nanda Kupa was called Chore Ghata. In this regard the word *'ghata'* not only means the steps on the riverbank where Vasudeva arrived carrying baby Krishna, but also refers to any steep slope where the land rises up at the base of an hill. After crossing the Yamuna from Koyla Ghata, Vasudeva had to climb up the slope of Nanda Tila, now called Chore Ghata, in order to reach Nanda's compound before entering the inner rooms of Yashoda Bhavana, where mother Yashoda was resting after having given birth.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.12 **Dadhi-manthana-sthala**

This is where Yashoda Mayi churned yogurt in order to make butter and ghee. The word *'dadhi'* and also *'dahi'* means yogurt and *'manthana'* means 'churning'. This place was Yashoda's kitchen area near to the *goshala* where there was a well for water, the fire for cooking and boiling milk, the yogurt churning pot, as well as grinding mortar, and where the Damodara-*lila* took place when Yashoda Mayi bound Krishna with a rope.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.13 **Nanda Kupa / Sapta-samudra Kupa**

This is where Nanda Maharaja obtained his families drinking water. The word *'kupa'* means a 'well'. Another name for this well is the Sapta-samudra Kupa, which means the well whose water contains 'seven sacred oceans'. It is also said that this well never goes dry.

How To Get There: (see map no. 30)

M.14 **Yamalarjuna-bhanjana-tirtha / Utkhal**

This is the famous site of the Damodara-*lila* where baby Krishna, who was tied to a large grinding mortar, caused the two *yamalarjuna* trees to come crashing down. When Lord Chaitanya reached this spot during His *parikrama*, He became exceedingly blissful as He relished Krishna's pastime of breaking the two enormous trees. The *Chaitanya-charitamrita* says**, "Shri Chaitanya then went to Srivana, Lohavana and then to Mahavana and saw Gokula, the place of Krishna's childhood pastimes. Upon seeing the place where the twin *arjuna* trees were broken by Lord Krishna. Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was moved to great ecstatic love."**

The *Chaitanya-charitamrita* says that Lord Chaitanya arrived at Gokula Mahavana towards the end of His *parikrama* of Vraja, but in the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says He arrived at Gokula via Renuka Grama (Renuka is Parashurama's birthplace), having arrived from Puri, even before going to Mathura. The *Chaitanya-mangala* however, says that Lord Chaitanya went to see Gokula Mahavana with the *sanodiya-brahmana* Krishna Dasa after having first seen all the holy places of Mathura. It appears from these references that Lord Chaitanya may have visited Gokula at least two or maybe three times during His pilgrimage to Vrindavana Dhama.

How To Get There: This place is on the road to Brahmanda Ghata. (see map no. 30)

The Damodara-*lila* Pastime

One day, mother Yashoda was churning yogurt and because Krishna was feeling hungry, He came there and indicated that he wanted to drink mother Yashoda's breast milk.

Stopping her churning, Yashoda Mayi sat Krishna on her lap and began happily feeding Krishna with her breast milk. Just then she noticed that a pot of milk on the fire was about to boil over and she immediately put Krishna down and jumped up to remove the pot. Krishna became extremely upset that His mother had interrupted Him drinking her breast milk to attend to the fire, and in a tantrum, picked up a stone and hurled it at a pot containing freshly churned butter, breaking it to pieces. Krishna then took a handful of butter and hid nearby while He ate the stolen butter.

When Yashoda Mayi returned, she could not see her little darling anywhere and then noticed the broken butter pot, and soon realized what had transpired. Taking a stick in her hand, Yashoda began searching for her naughty son but could not find Him anywhere. While searching, she entered a room where the grinding mortar *(utkhal*) was kept and found Krishna sitting on the upturned mortar feeding butter from an overhanging pot to all the monkeys. On seeing His mother in an angry mood and carrying a stick, Krishna ran away as fast as He could with mother Yashoda chasing after Him. Krishna began running here and there with mother Yashoda close on His heels. However, Krishna was very fast and mother Yashoda was very slow, due to her large breasts and heavy hips, and very soon became tired. Her hair loosened and her flower garland scattered, but she eventually managed to catch hold of her mischievous child. Seeing the fear in Krishna's eyes, Yashoda threw away the stick but decided that she would bind her naughty son to the grinding mortar as a punishment for His bad behavior.

In Indian villages, this practice of binding badly behaved children with a rope, instead of beating them, is a common practice. Mother Yashoda then brought a rope to bind Krishna, but the rope was too short. Taking some more rope and joining it, Yasoda again tried to bind Krishna to the grinding mortar, but again the rope was too short. Yashoda once again brought some more rope, but again it was still too short. This went on a few times and mother Yashoda was becoming bewildered. When Krishna saw that mother Yashoda was tired and also bewildered in her attempts to tie Him up, He allowed her to tie the rope around his waist and then to the heavy grinding mortar. The actual truth is that nobody can easily bind the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even if He is appearing as a small helpless child in the house of Yashoda Mayi

After she had tied Krishna to the grinding mortar, mother Yashoda went about the rest of her household duties, quite unmindful of what might happen next. However, Krishna was not ready to remain idly sitting tied to a grinding mortar, and exhibiting unbelievable strength for a little boy, began to crawl along the floor dragging the large heavy mortar behind Him. As Krishna crawled along the ground, he crawled between two large *arjuna* trees in the courtyard, but as Krishna crawled through the small gap, the large mortar was too big and got wedged between the two trees, and when Krishna pulled even harder, the two trees suddenly came crashing down. At that moment, two effulgent beings appeared from the two trees and prostrated themselves before Krishna while offering prayers.

These two effulgent beings were the celestial brothers Nalakuvara and Manigrivara, the two wayward sons of the demigod Kuvera. In their former life, they had been drinking strong liquor and in a drunken state were sporting naked in a river with young girls. While still in a drunken stupor and completely naked, they shamelessly appeared before Shrila Narada Muni, who was passing nearby. In order to redeem them, Narada cursed the two brothers to stand naked as trees for a thousand years until Krishna would appear in Gokula, when they would be eventually redeemed by the grace of the Lord. By the mercy of Narada, and after a long *tapasya* as trees, the two brothers had now come to their senses and were also able to have *darshana* of the Supreme Personality of Godhead standing there before them. After glorifying Krishna and offering their most heart-felt prayers to the Lord, the two brothers then paid their humble obeisances by touching their heads to the ground, and after circumambulating Krishna, they departed for their own abode known as Alakapuri in the heavenly realms.

After hearing the great crashing sound made by the two large *arjuna* trees when they snapped and crashed to the ground, everyone came running to the spot including Nanda and Yashoda and all the cowherd men. They could not understand what caused the two great

trees to come crashing down. Nanda untied Krishna from the mortar and some of the elderly *gopis* took Him back to Yashoda's residential quarters. Nanda Maharaja and the cowherd men believed that the toppling of the twin *arjuna* trees must be the work of demons, although some small children playing nearby said that Krishna had actually done it. Some of the cowherd men told Nanda that his son Krishna was not an ordinary boy and possessed uncommon strength; and said they also believed that it was possible that Krishna might have done it. After this disturbing incidence and due to the constant fear of demons attacking Gokula, Nanda Maharaja, in consultation with his elder brother and advisor Upananda and the other cowherd men, decided to leave Gokula and move their residences to the forest of Vrindavana on the opposite side of the Yamuna River. The *Damodara-lila* and the felling of the twin *arjuna* trees, more or less brought to a close Krishna's transcendental pastimes at Gokula. The Damodara-*lila* also marked the end of Krishna's pastimes as a baby boy, known as His *kaumara-lila*, or childhood-pastimes. The childhood pastimes of Krishna at Gokula, where He lived up to the age of three and a half years are often referred to as His *bala-lila*, the word '*bala*' means a 'little boy'.

BM.83 **RAMANAKA (Ramana Reti)**

This sandy beach near the bank of the Yamuna is presently known as Ramana Reti but was previously known as Ramanaka, and it was the place where Krishna and Balarama enjoyed playing childhood games with Their friends in the sand. It is said that this transcendental playground was rediscovered by Shrila Narayana Bhatta. The word *'ramana'* means 'pleasure' and *'reti'* means 'sand'. At the present moment one can see a temple of Radha and Krishna and a very large *goshala* at this place. Ramananaka is situated in the small forest of Ramanavana which is mentioned in the *Puranas* as one of the *upavanas* of Vrindavana Dhama.

How To Get There: This place is 1km northwest of Mahavana Village. (see map no. 29A)

BM.84 **RAVALA**

In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says. **"O Srinivasa this is Ravala, the village where Vrishabhanu used to very happily live. Shri Radhika appeared here, and by Her auspicious appearance the whole world was filled with joy".** Radharani appeared on a Monday which was the eighth day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of *Bhadra*, as the daughter of Vrishabhanu Maharaja and Kirtida Devi, at that time it is said that the demigods showered flowers that they had collected from the Nandakanana celestial gardens near Meru Parvata. Because She was born the year after Krishna's birth, during the constellation of *Anuradha*, She was called Radhika.

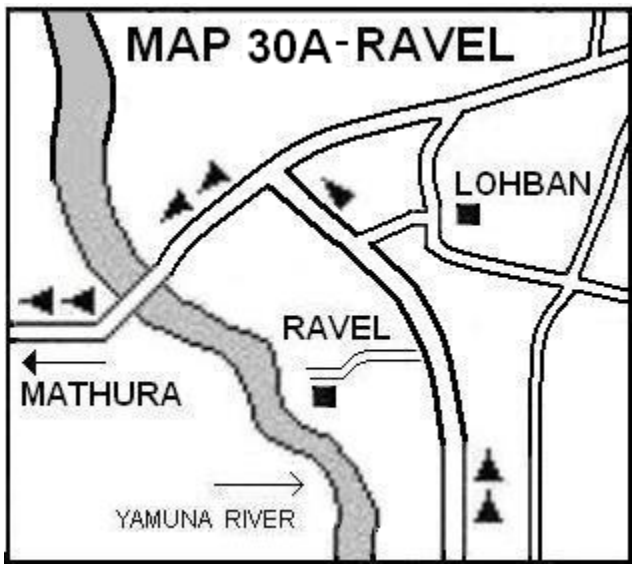
This village is situated on the banks of Yamuna and there is a temple here known as the Larily-lala Mandira, where one can see the beautiful deities of Radha and Krishna. The name *'larily'* is used to describe a sweet young girl and means 'beloved darling girl'. The name *'lala'* means 'beloved darling boy' and is used to describe young boys. Before the construction of Varsana's Shriji Mandira, Shrimati Radharani's birthplace at Ravala, being very close to Mathura, was one of the most popular pilgrimage places in Vraja, but now very few pilgrims come here. Fortunately, Ravala is situated on the Vraja Mandala Parikrama route and therefore the *Vraja-yatris* regularly visit this sacred place and have *darshana* at the Larily-lala Mandira. Ravala is situated in the small forest of Ravalavana which is mentioned in the *Puranas* as being one of the *upavanas* or sub-forests of Vrindavana Dhama.

In the *Vraja-vilasa-stava* the appearance of Radharani is described as follows. **"Who can understand the great joy in Vrishabhanu's house when Radhika appeared from the womb of Kirtida. Shri Radha's effulgent form illuminated the ten directions. Whoever sees Radha just once is freed from the threefold miseries. Her body is extremely soft and Her complexion is like molten gold. Alas! How is it possible to describe the exquisite movements of Her limbs. Seeing Her beauty Her parents could not control their excitement and repeatedly looked at Her moonlike face."**

Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu also visited Ravala during His *parikrama* of Vraja and attracted large crowds who arrived there to see Him, thinking that He must be Krishna

Himself having returned to Vrindavana in the guise of a *sannyasi*. In the *Bhakti-ratnakara* it says**. "After coming from Gokula, Gaurachandra and His associates stayed here for some time. He became overwhelmed with ecstatic love when He saw Ravala. What to speak of others, even Ananta Sesha cannot describe His feelings of love. People came running from all directions chanting the names of Hari and exclaiming, 'Oh brother, see this jewel amongst *sannyasis*!' Everyone then became maddened drinking the nectar of Mahaprabhu's moonlike face. Being greatly happy, they spoke amongst themselves saying that Mahaprabhu was actually Krishna while others said that simply by seeing His golden complexioned form they had become speechless, even though they wanted to speak."**

How To Get There: This place is 6km north of Mahavana and 9km southeast of Mathura. (see map no. 29 & 29A)



The Divine Appearance of Shrimati Radharani

The *Puranas* relate a story concerning the divine appearance of Shrimati Radharani as follows. One day, Vrishabhanu Maharaja went to the bank of Yamuna at around noon to take a midday bath. At that moment he saw a golden lotus flower floating on the water and shining brightly like a thousand suns. Vrishabhanu immediately waded into the river and when he came near to the golden lotus flower, he beheld the most beautiful and radiant form of baby girl lying within the petals of the lotus.

At that same moment, Lord Brahma suddenly appeared there and speaking in a grave voice, informed Vrishabhanu that in his previous life, Vrishabhanu and his wife Kirtida had performed great austerities in order to get the consort of Lord Vishnu as their daughter. Lord Brahma told Vrishabhanu that this girl was the origin of the goddess Lakshmi and that he should take great care of Her. Lord Brahma then placed the baby girl in the arms of Vrishabhanu who became overjoyed, and after taking permission from Lord Brahma, returned to his home. Seeing the beautiful baby girl shining like millions of autumnal moons, mother Kirtida was overcome with joy and immediately arranged for all kinds of religious rites to be performed and donated thousands of cows to the *brahmanas.* At that time baby Radhika was placed in a gem-studded cradle and gently rocked back and forth by all the little girls of the village. Day by day Her luster increased just like the digits of the moon.

Within a short while it was observed that the baby girl made no noise and had not yet opened Her eyes. Vrishabhanu and his wife feared that their baby girl was perhaps blind from birth and also dumb. At that time, Shrila Narada Muni visited the home of Vrishabhanu and informed him that regardless of the girl's apparent blindness, they should continue with the birth celebrations. Vrishabhanu therefore made elaborate arrangements for a lavish

birth celebration and sent out invitations to all the residents of Ravala and Gokula and especially to his dear friend Nanda Maharaja and his family.

On the appointed day, the guests had assembled and the birth celebrations were going on in great jubilation. Nanda Maharaja and Yashoda Mayi had arrived with Rohini and also brought their small children Krishna and Balarama. Kirtida met with Yashoda and told her that she was very happy to have such a beautiful daughter, but was feeling rather distraught because her child was both dumb and blind. Krishna had just passed His first birthday and was happily crawling around the courtyard on His hands and knees. Arriving at the cot in which Radhika was lying, Krishna held on to the sides and managed to lift himself up, He then peered into the cot where His gaze fell upon the beautiful moon-like face of baby Radhika. As soon as baby Radhika smelt the exotic fragrance of Krishna's transcendental body, She immediately opened Her eyes for the very first time, and looked directly at Krishna, who was the first person that She had ever seen. As Krishna gazed lovingly at baby Radhika, He began smiling ecstatically. Radhika then suddenly began to cry and for the very first time she made a sound. Vrishabhanu and Kirtida, along with all the assembled *Vrajavasis,* were overjoyed to find out that their beloved daughter Radhika, was not blind nor dumb after all.

In the *Radha-rasa-sudha-nidhi* it says**. "So powerful is the glancing of Her eyes, that the flute slips from Krishna's hands, His peacock crown starts to slip, and His yellow shawl becomes displaced as He swoons and falls to the ground. Alas, will I ever get the chance to serve with love and devotion such a person as Radharani."**

M.2 **Vishrama Ghata / Vishranti-tirtha**

For the Vraja-*yatris* who began their Vraja Mandala Parikrama, from either Vrindavana or from Mathura, taking bath in the Yamuna at Vishrama Ghata marks the end of the Vraja Mandala Parikrama.

How To Get There: (see map no. 7)

END OF VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA

GLOSSARY

A

Abhisheka – sacred bathing ceremony of the temple deity

Achamana – ritual of purification with water, *mudras*, and mantras
Acharya – a guru who teaches by example
Aprakata-lila – Krishna's un-manifested or hidden pastimes
Apsara – the beautiful dancing girls from the heavenly planets.
Ashrama – a hermitage for holy men
Ashta-kaliya-lila – Krishna's eightfold daily pastimes
Ashta-sakhis – the eight principle *gopis* and companions of Radharani
Ashvamedha-yajna – Vedic horse sacrifice
Avatara – the incarnation of God who descends from the spiritual world

B

Baithaka – sitting place
Bhajana – process of meditation by chanting on beads
Bhajana – singing devotional songs
Bhajana Kutira – a simple hut for solitary meditation
Bhakti – the process of devotional service to Krishna
Bhava – pure spiritual emotion
Brahma – the avatar of Lord Vishnu in the mode of passion
Brahma – the anti-material spiritual energy
Brahmachari – a celibate student
Brahmana – a Vedic priest and learned person of the highest caste.
Brijbasi – (see Vrajavasi)
Brijbasha – local Hindi dialect spoken in the Vrindavana Area

C

Chakra – the fiery disc-like weapon of Lord Vishnu
Chandra – the moon and also the name of the moon god
Chaurasi-kosa – 84 *kosa* - equal to 168 miles which is the diameter of the holy Dhama
Chaturmasya – the four months of the rainy season

D

Dana – a tax , a toll, and also a donation
Dandavata – offering obeisance's by lying on the ground like a stick
Darshana – to see something sacred like a deity, a holy place, or holy person
Dauji – one's elder brother
Deha – the material or spiritual body
Dhama – the earthly abode of the Lord like Vrindavana or Dwaraka
Dharma – the practice of eternal religion and its principles
Diksha – the process of initiation by a guru

E

Ekadashi – the 11th day after the waxing and waning moons, a day of fasting from grains
Ekanamsa – Krishna's sister born of Yashoda, also called Yogamaya Devi

G

Gaudiya – a geographical reference meaning either Bengal or northern India
Gaudiya Vaishnava – a follower of Lord Chaitanya
Gaudiya sampradaya – the northern branch of the Madhava *sampradaya*
Ghata – steps going down the bank of a river or lake
Ghata – the meeting point of two hills, or any steep incline
Gocharana-lila – Krishna's pastimes of herding cows
Gocharana – the hoof-print of cows
Gopa – a cowherd boy or man of Vrindavana
Gopi – a cowherd girl or milkmaid of Vrindavana
Goshala – a dairy farm or place where cows live
Goswami – a holy man renounced from family life who has gained control over his senses
Guru – a teacher of the Vedas

Gurukula – the residential school or teaching place of a guru

H

Harinama – chanting the holy names of the Lord
Harinama-sankirtana – the congregational chanting of gods names
Hladini-sakti – the internal potency of the Lord personified by Radharani
Holi – the festival of throwing colors also known as *Dola-yatra* in Bengal and Orissa

I

Indra – the king of the heavenly planets
Indriya – the senses

J

Japa – chanting the holy names on beads
Jhula – a swing used by the *gopis*
Jiva – the identity of the self as pure spirit soul
Jnana – knowledge, especially of the self

K

Kali-yuga – the present age symptomised by irreligion, quarrel, and hypocrisy
Karttika – the most sacred and auspicious month of the Vedic calendar (Oct/Nov)
Khandi – a large grove of trees belonging to the same species
Kirtana – group chanting of the holy names
Kosa – an ancient measurement equal to about two miles
Ksatriya – a chivalrous warrior or prince of the marshal caste
Kunda – a sacred lake
Kunja – a sacred forest bower
Kupa – a sacred well

L

Lila – the sacred pastimes of Krishna
Lila-sthana – a sacred place of Krishna's pastimes (also *lila-sthala*)
Lila-smaranam – remembering the transcendental pastimes of Krishna

M

Madhukari – the system of collecting alms by those in the renounced order
Madhurya-rasa – the conjugal relationship between Krishna and the *gopis*
Maha-bhagavata – a very advanced Vaishnava of the very highest order
Maha-bhava – the highest spiritual emotion exhibited by Radha and Krishna
Maha-mantra – the great sixteen syllable chant of deliverance
Mana – the emotion caused by a lover's anger or jealous pique
Mandala – any circular shaped area or region
Mandira – a temple where one can achieve peace (*dhira*) of mind (*mana*)
Mangala-arati – the pre-dawn worship of the temple deity
Manjari – a young maid-servant of Radharani
Muni – a highly realized and enlightened ascetic
Murti – the deity form of the Supreme Lord worshiped in the temple

N

Naishtika-brahmachari – a life-long celibate from birth
Nitya-siddha gopis – the eternally liberated *gopis* who incarnate along with Krishna

P

Parakiya-bhava – the highest spiritual emotion experienced by Krishna and the *gopis*
Parampara – the bona-fide system of passing divine knowledge from guru to disciple
Parikrama – the circumambulation of a holy place
Pandita – a *brahmana* or any person very learned in Vedic knowledge
Prashadam – sacred remnants of an offering to the deity or spiritual master
Pratibhu-murti – a replica or replacement deity having the same potency as the original
Pinda – a food offering made during the *sraddha* ceremony to ones departed forefathers
Prakata-lila – the manifested earthly pastimes of Krishna
Prema – unadulterated pure love of God
Puja – offering various paraphernalia of worship to the temple deity or spiritual master
Pujari – a priest serving the deity in a temple
Puranas – 18 historical records supplementary to the four Vedas called the fifth Veda

R

Rasa – divine taste due to ecstatic love / transcendental spiritual pleasure
Rasa-lila – the divine dance of ecstatic love enjoyed by Krishna and the *gopis*
Rasa-mandala – the circular arena of the *rasa*-dance
Rasa-sthali – the place where the *rasa-lila* was held
Rasika – a pure devotee who can relish Krishna's divine pastimes
Rajasuya-yajna – a Vedic fire sacrifice performed by kings to establish their supremacy

S

Sadhana – the purificatory practices of the yoga system
Sakha – an intimate cowherd boyfriend of Krishna
Sakhi – an intimate and confidential girlfriend of Radharani
Samadhi – the final resting place or tomb of a great saint
Samadhi – a trance-like state of deep meditation, the last stage in *ashtanga*-yoga practice
Sambhanda – love in direct association with Krishna
Sampradaya – an unbroken line of disciplic succession originating from Krishna
Sankirtana – the congregational or group chanting of the Lord's holy names
Sannyasi – one who has renounced all connection with family, home, and society
Shastra – any of the revealed Vedic scriptures
Shiva – the avatar of Lord Vishnu in the mode of ignorance
Seva – devotional service offered to the temple deity or spiritual master
Seva-puja – the worship of the temple deity
Siddha-deha – one's eternal spiritual form
Siksha – instructions given by a guru or advanced Vaishnava
Siksha guru – the instructor spiritual master
Simhasana – the platform on which the deity stands, or the seat of a great personality
Shiva – the incarnation of Vishnu in the mode of Ignorance
Sraddha – a Vedic ceremony honoring departed forefathers
Shringara – the decoration with ornaments and clothing of the temple deity
Shringara – the erotic decoration of Srimati Radharani by Krishna

T

Tapasya – voluntary acceptance of hardship and austerity for the purpose of purification
Tilak – the clay markings signifying Lord Vishnu seen on the body of a Vaishnava
Tirtha – a sacred or holy place where one can be purified of sin

V

Vaishnava – a devotee of Lord Vishnu or Krishna
Vamsi – Krishna's bamboo flute
Vana – forest
Vata – a banyana tree
Vipralamba – love in separation from Krishna
Vraja – the innermost core of the Dhama where Krishna performed His pastimes
Vraja Mandala – the entire area of the holy Dhama equal to *chaurasi-kosa*

Vrajavasi – a resident of Vrindavana specifically during the time of Krishna's pastimes
Vrata – a vow undertaken for spiritual advancement

Y

Yadava – a member of the Yadu Dynasty of *ksatriyas* in which Lord Krishna appeared
Yajna – a fire sacrifice or any other type of Vedic sacrifice approved by *sashtra*
Yaksha – an malevolent spirit and servants of the demigod Kuvera, king of Yakshas
Yakshini – a female Yaksha generally considered to be maidservants of Parvati
Yogamaya – the internal potency of Krishna
Yogamaya Devi – Krishna's sister also called Ekanamsa Devi
Yojana – an ancient Vedic measurement equal to about 8 miles
Yuga – an ancient Vedic division of time, the present age is known as Kali-*yuga*
Yutheshvari – a *gopi* leader who has her own group of younger *gopi* followers

Chronology of Important Events in the History of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya

There has never been a strong tradition amongst Indian scholars in recording the dates of important events in their history, either in ancient times, or in the middle ages, when the important events in the

life and times of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took place. Indian scholars throughout the ages have been primarily concerned with more weighty subjects such as self-realization, yoga, philosophy, and metaphysics. Therefore modern-day scholars of Indian history are always confronted with a problem in establishing an accurate chronology of historical events. The following chronology is the most accurate compilation available and gives us a clear picture of developments in the glorious history of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya.

1434 Appearance of Advaita Acharya
1450 Appearance of Haridasa Thakura
1470 Appearance of Ramananda Raya
1473 Appearance of Lord Nityananda
1479 Madhavendra Puri Visits Govardhana Hill to perform *bhajana*
1479 Madhavendra Puri discovers the deity of Gopala and establishes His worship
1482 Advaita Acharya takes *diksha* from Madhavandra Puri in Vrindavana
1483 Appearance of Lokanatha Goswami
1486 Appearance of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at Navadwipa
1487 Appearance of Gadadhara Pandita
1488 Appearance of Sanatana Goswami
1489 Appearance of Rupa Goswami
1491 Disappearance of Madhavendra Puri
1491 Vishvarupa (Lord Chaitanya's brother) takes *sannyasa*
1494 Appearance of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami
1496 Appearance of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami
1503 Appearance of Gopala Bhatta Goswami
1505 Appearance of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami
1509 Lokanatha and Bhugarbha Goswamis arrive in Vrindavana
1510 Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu takes *sannyasa*
1513 Appearance of Jiva Goswami
1515 Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu performs the first Vraja Mandala Parikrama
1515 Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu discovers Radha-kunda
1516 Rupa and Sanatana Goswamis arrive in Vrindavana
1516 Prabhodananda Saraswati Goswami arrives in Vrindavana
1534 The first Madana-mohana Temple opens in Vrindavana
1534 Disappearance of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at Jagannatha Puri
1534 Appearance of Narottama Dasa Thakura
1535 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami arrives in Vrindavana
1535 Jiva Goswami arrives in Vrindavana
1541 Disappearance of Lord Nityananda
1541 Completion of the *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* by Rupa Goswami
1542 First *seva-puja* of Radha Damodara
1542 First *seva-puja* of Radharamana
1545 Jiva Goswami purchases the land around Radha-kunda
1545 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami begins the excavation of Radha-kunda
1550 Disappearance of Advaita Acharya
1554 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami completes excavation of Radha-kunda
1554 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami becomes the first *Mahanta* of Radha-kunda
1558 Disappearance of Sanatana Goswami
1564 Disappearance of Rupa Goswami
1570 Emperor Akbar visits Jiva Goswami in Vrindavana
1575 Completion of *Chaitanya-bhagavata* by Vrindavana Dasa Thakura
1576 Raghunatha Dasa Goswami appoints Jiva Goswami as *Mahant* of Radha-kunda
1578 Disappearance of Gopala Bhatta Goswami
1579 Disappearance of Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami
1580 Completion of the second Madana-mohana Mandira in Vrindavana
1581 Completion of *Chaitanya-charitamrta* by Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami
1582 Jahnava Mata visits Vrindavana and Radha-kunda
1582 Disappearance of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami
1583 Disappearance of Raghunatha Dasa Goswami
1585 Disappearance of Lokanatha Goswami
1590 Completion of the Govindaji Mandira in Vrindavana
1608 Disappearance of Jiva Goswami

1611 Disappearance of Narottama Dasa Thakura
1630 Disappearance of Shyamananda Pandita Goswami
1638 Appearance of Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura
1670 Emperor Aurangzeb desecrates the temples of Vrindavana
1708 Disappearance of Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura
1838 Appearance of Bhaktivinoda Thakura
1874 Appearance of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami
1896 Appearance of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
1914 Disappearance of Bhaktivinoda Thakura
1915 Disappearance of Gaura Kisore Dasa Babaji
1936 Disappearance of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami

Chronology of Important Events in the Life of
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

1896 Born Abhaya Charana De in Calcutta, India
1922 Meets for the first time Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati at Calcutta
1932 Meets Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati at Kosi during Vraja *Parikrama*
1933 Accepts initiation from Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati at Allahabad
1935 Meets Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati at Radha-kunda
1944 Starts Back To Godhead Magazine
1947 Awarded the title 'Bhaktivedanta' by the Gaudiya Vaishnava Society
1950 Retires from family life and accepts the *varnaprastha ashram*
1956 Arrives in Vrindavana and stays at the Vamsi Gopala Mandira
1959 Begins the English translation of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*
1959 Moves to the Radha Damodara Mandira
1959 Accepts the renounced order of *tridandi-sannyasa*
1960 Publishes first book 'Easy Journey to Other Planets'
1962 Publishes part one of the first canto of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*
1963 Publishes part two of the first canto of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*
1964 Publishes part three and completes the first canto of *Shrimad Bhagavatam*
1965 Leaves India for the U.S.A. aboard the steamship 'Jaladuta'
1966 Founds International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York
1966 Opens his first temple in New York, U.S.A
1967 Returns to India for recuperation and stays at Radha Damodara
1967 Returns to the U.S.A.
1971 Returns to India with his Western disciples and stays at Radha Damodara
1972 Lectures for one month on the Nectar of Devotion at Radha Damodara
1972 Leads the first *parikrama* of Vraja by Western devotees
1973 Establishes Iskcon's first Indian temple at Mayapura, West Bengal
1975 Establishes the Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana
1977 Disappearance of His Divine Grace A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada on November 11TH at the Krishna Balarama Mandira in Vrindavana

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INDEX OF MAPS

BM.84 VRAJA MANDALA PARIKRAMA 22
BM.88 VRAJA MANDALA AREA 20
1. VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 25

2. VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 26
2a. MADANA-MOHANA MANDIR 32
3. VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 35
3a. SEVA KUNJA 48
3b. RADHA DAMODARA MANDIRA 40
3c. RADHA GOKULANANDA MANDIRA 53
3d. RADHARAMANA MANDIRA 58
3e. NIDHIVANA 51
4. VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 64
4a. 64 SAMADHIS / VENU KUPA 66
5. VRINDAVANA PARIKRAMA 70
6. AMBIKA-KANANA / GOKARNESHWARA 75
7. MATHURA PARIKRAMA 79
7a. VISHRAMA GHATA 81
7b. DHRUVA GHATA / KAMSA TILA 82
7c. SHRI KRISHNA JANMASTHANA 85
8. MADHUVANA (Maholi) 91
9. TALAVAN (Tarsi) 94
10. KAMUDAVANA (Kudarban) 96
11. SHANTANU-KUNDA (Satoha) 98
12. BAHULAVANA (Bati) 102
13. GARUDA-GOVINDA / SAKATIKARA (Chhatikara) 103
14. RADHA-KUNDA / SHYAMA-KUNDA 110
15. GOVARDHANA PARIKRAMA (East & West) 129
15a. KUSUMA SAROVARA / SHYAMA KUTI 130
15b. MANASI-GANGA 134
15c. GOVINDA-KUNDA 141
15d. APSARA-KUNDA 143
16. SHYAMA DHAKA 150
17. ADIBADRINATHA 156
18. KAMYAVANA (Kaman) 161
18a. BHOJANA THALI (Kamyavana) 170
19. UNCAGRAMA (Uchagaon) 174
20. VARSANA (Barsana) 179
21. SANKET 184
22. NANDAGRAMA (Nandgoan) 188
23. YAVAT (Jao) 204
24. RAMA GHATA 211
25. BHANDIRAVANA (Chhanhari) 220
26. BILVAVAN TO LOHBAN 224
27. BILVAVANA (Belvana) 225
28. LAUHAVANA (Lohban) 228
29. LOHBAN TO RAVEL 230
29A. MAHAVANA AREA 232
30. GOKULA (Mahavana) 235
30A RAVEL 242

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari was born in England in 1948 and joined the Hare Krishna Movement in 1972. He received direct initiation from Swami Prabhupada in 1973 at Iskcon's Bhaktivedanta Manor

near London where he served as the first temple commander. In January 1975, desiring to make further advancement in spiritual life, Rajasekhara moved to India and the holy city of Vrindavana, where he became a temple priest at Iskcon's Krishna-Balarama Mandira. During the 80's Rajasekhara became the leader of one of Vrindavana's most successful Travelling Sankirtan Parties which set new records in book distribution and Life-membership enrolment. Rajasekhara also became well-known as a kirtan singer and along with the accomplished musician Akshayananda – playing mayura-vina, they performed at festivals all over India. Being deeply attached to the holy land of Lord Krishna, Rajasekhara still resides in Vrindavana even today where he presently engaged in various aspects of Vedic research and writing books. At the present time, Rajasekhara is considered to be the world's leading authority on the subject of Vrindavana Dhama and its holy places, his numerous books about Vrindavana are read the world over by Iskcon devotees and all those interested in understanding the deeper mysteries of Lord Krishna's abode, where the Lord performed His transcendental pastimes on earth over 5,000 years ago. Rajasekhara is also well-known for his exquisite photographs of Vrindavana which are featured throughout his books and which perfectly capture the transcendental atmosphere of the holy Dhama. His personal experience and spiritual realizations, after having lived in India and the holy land of Vrindavana for almost forty years – is adequately conveyed through his writings, and those who read his books find themselves immediately transported to the transcendental spiritual platform. During his long sojourn in India, Rajasekhara has visited all the important holy places of pilgrimage from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, including such famous places as Badrinatha, Yamunotri, Dwaraka, Tirupati, Rangapatnam, Anantapadmanabhu, Madurai, Kumbhakonam, Tanjore, and Jagannatha Puri, to name just a few. Due to his pilgrimage he has gained a treasure-trove of knowledge while imbibing the very essence of India's ancient religious culture. His understanding of Vedic philosophy has been acknowledged by all those who have heard him speak on Gaudiya Vedanta. Amongst his upcoming publications, Rajasekhara is writing a much-awaited summary study based on the 5th canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam – Shrila Veda Vyasadeva's highly acclaimed Vedic classic, which deals with subjects like the fabled Mount Meru, ancient Bharata-varsha, the demigod's kingdom of Jambhudwipa, and the position of both heavenly and hellish planets in the universe.

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